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- ☑ Get instant answers to anything
- ☑ Summarise long docs in seconds
- ☑ Write complaint letters that work
- ☑ Create images quickly from text
- ☑ No ads in results (ditch Google!)
- ✚ Everything you can do FOR FREE!

PLUS

REMOVE COPILOT FROM YOUR COMPUTER
And other Microsoft junk p74

DON'T UPGRADE TO WINDOWS 11 24H2
Get the tools but NOT the bugs – page 62

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From the Editor

If I was feeling clever I would've asked ChatGPT to write this, but that's not what the tool is for. Forget the scare stories that AI will replace human creativity. Instead it will improve our lives in ways we are barely beginning to imagine.

Robert Irvine reveals some of these in his excellent Cover Feature. He's right that ChatGPT is by some distance the best AI program open to the public. What's key is that it's built for everyday users, not just IT experts or professional coders. It's improving quickly too, with new tools being added all the time.

I'm usually sceptical of technology that's meant to be life-changing, but ChatGPT merits the claim. I think it's going to become as big a part of our lives as Google, so it's essential you start mastering it now. For once, you *should* believe the hype.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

PS Our 2024 Back Issue CD and Stick are now on sale – visit www.snipca.com/53512

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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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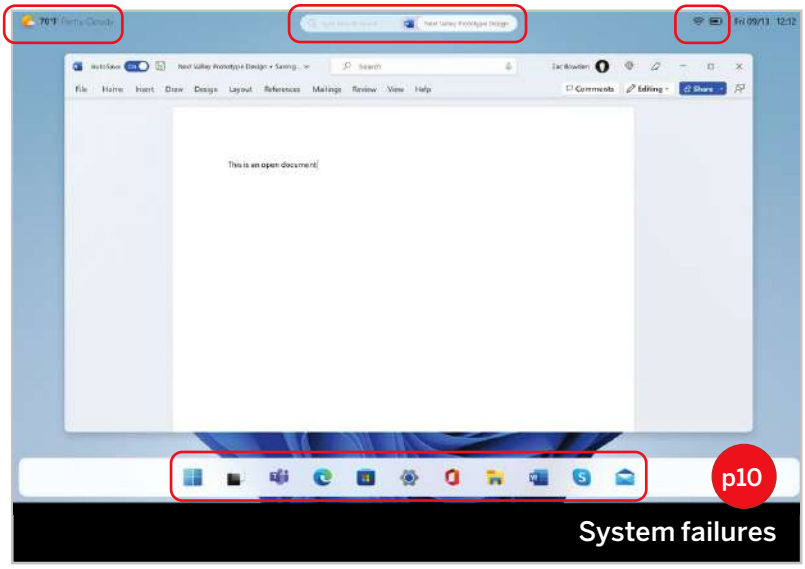

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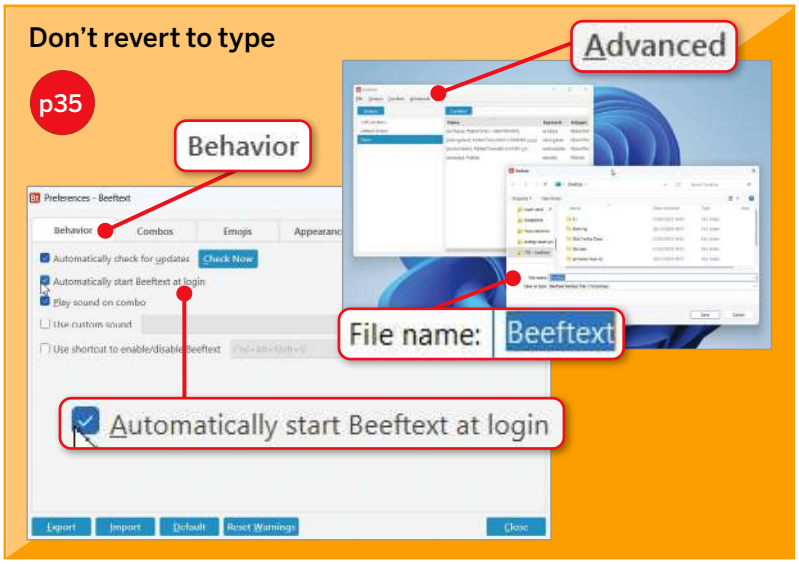

WHY YOU MUST USE
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COVER FEATURE P50
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Get instant answers to anything
Summarise long docs in seconds
Write complaint letters that work
Create images quickly from text
No ads in results (ditch Google!)
Everything you can do FOR FREE!

Microsoft forces 24H2 on to PCs despite countless bugs

Microsoft has started to force Windows 11 computers to upgrade to version 24H2, despite admitting several bugs with the update that are causing serious problems.

It announced the move on its 'Windows 11 known issues and notifications' page (www.snipca.com/53530), saying it had reached a "new stage in the phased rollout of version 24H2".

It means computers running versions 23H2 and 22H2 will be "gradually updated to version 24H2". Microsoft will decide which machines are best able to run 24H2 and install the update on those first.

Microsoft has already ended support for version 22H2, and plans to end support for 23H2 on 11 November 2025.

The update, which can take over one hour to install, is compulsory. You can however postpone it for five weeks by opening Windows Settings (press Windows key+I), then clicking Windows Update (1 in our screenshot) followed by 'Pause for 1 week' 2.

You'll see a 'Pausing updates' icon and heading

confirming your decision 3. You can pause for a maximum of five weeks, after which you'll have to install the update.

If you want to install it within that five-week period click the 'Resume updates' button, which appears where 'Check for updates' is 4.

Version 24H2, which was released on 1 October as the second major update of 2024, adds several useful features to Windows 11, including new battery-saving controls and Bluetooth LE audio for hearing aids.

But users have reported many problems, such as Disk Cleanup misreporting how much data can be deleted and incompatible drivers causing the Blue Screen of Death.

Microsoft responded in October by pausing the automatic installation of 24H2, but has now decided to resume it. It will aim to fix new problems as new users report them.

• Fix Windows 11 24H2 bugs – page 62

WHAT WE THINK

Having axed support for version 22H2, Microsoft had little choice but to update computers running it to 24H2. This will make those machines safe, but users should prepare themselves for a host of problems. If you run 23H2, we'd advise pausing the update for the full five weeks to give Microsoft more time to fix any new bugs that emerge.

Sites with sexual content must have age checks by July

All websites where sexually explicit content can be found have until July to introduce "robust" methods to check that users are 18 or over.

The new rules, from telecoms regulator Ofcom, aim to prevent children from easily accessing pornography online.

Research suggests that on average children in the UK first see explicit online material at the age of 13. One in 10 children have seen it by the age of nine.

The measures are part of the Online Safety Act, which passed in October 2023, and covers social-media services as well as porn websites.

Ofcom has published acceptable ways a site can check a person's age, including using information from a user's bank or mobile network. They can also use software that scans the user's face to estimate age.

Melanie Dawes, head of Ofcom, said the rules had to be strengthened because sites had "effectively been treating all users as if they're adults, leaving children potentially exposed to porn and other types of harmful content" (www.snipca.com/53529).

But some porn sites and privacy campaigners have said the measures will push people to "darker corners" of the internet.

Do you agree with age-verification checks? Let us know: letters@comuteractive.co.uk

You'll like this...
Google is using AI to stop website pop-ups (www.snipca.com/53527)

but not this...
Over 500 victims lost £370,000 in Booking.com scams (www.snipca.com/53517)

Linux body funds Chromium research, in blow to Firefox

The Linux Foundation has formed a group to pay for research to improve Chromium browsers, in a blow to Mozilla's Firefox.

Chromium is the source code Google uses for Chrome. It's open source, letting other companies use it to build their own browsers. Microsoft's Edge runs on Chromium, as do Brave, Opera and Vivaldi.

Firefox is the only major browser to use its own different code, called Gecko.

The Linux Foundation, which promotes the use of open-source software and operating systems, says the new Supporters of Chromium-Based Browsers will help to "remove barriers to innovation" (see www.snipca.com/53504).

It added that Google, Meta, Microsoft and Opera have all committed to fund the project.

If these efforts pay off and attract more users, it could further reduce Firefox's market share. This currently stands at 2.47 per cent, having plunged from a peak of 30 per cent in 2009.

Mozilla has repeatedly warned that Chromium's dominance reduces browser choice for users and ultimately limits innovation.

However, browsers based on Chromium can still add their own tools to make them different.

For example, Opera has a VPN while Brave blocks most adverts and trackers that let advertisers see what you do online.

This makes them far more private than Google's Chrome, although it remains by far the world's most popular browser with a market share of over 68 per cent across all devices. It hasn't been below 60 per cent since 2018.

Is Firefox better than the Chromium browsers? Let us know: letters@comuteractive.co.uk

Netflix overtakes BBC One for first time

Netflix was the most-watched TV service between September and November last year, overtaking the BBC for the first time.

Official viewing figures put Netflix's average audience at 43.2 million, slightly higher than BBC One's 42.3 million.

However, BBC One reclaimed top position in December with 48.4 million viewers, thanks to Christmas hits like *Gavin & Stacey* and *Wallace & Gromit: Vengeance Most Fowl*.

Audience reach is measured by the number of people who watch a television service for at least three consecutive minutes in a month.

A BBC spokesman said it was "meaningless" to compare a single broadcast channel like BBC One with "an entire subscription video on demand service" like Netflix.

He said the BBC is "digital first" and nearly all its comedy and drama "is released as a day one drop on BBC iPlayer".

"The BBC portfolio is almost twice the size of Netflix over the year," he added, and claimed that iPlayer is "the fastest growing TV streaming service in the UK".

Netflix, which overtook ITV in March 2023, now has 17 million subscribers in the UK.

Do you now watch Netflix more often than the BBC? Let us know: letters@comuteractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

WATCH 'AI PARKINSON' CELEB INTERVIEWS

Sir Michael Parkinson has been revived as a "digital replica" in a new series of celebrity interviews. Called 'Virtually Parkinson', it's been fed data from over 2,000 Parkinson interviews to recreate his voice and interview style. The first interview, with US singer Jason Derulo (pictured), is available now on YouTube: www.snipca.com/53502.

FACEBOOK AXES 'BIASED' FACT-CHECKERS

Facebook has stopped using teams of fact-checkers in the US to check the accuracy of posts after claiming they were biased. It will instead rely on users reporting misinformation. Meta, which owns Facebook, said this will "allow more speech by lifting restrictions on some topics that are part of mainstream discourse". It hasn't yet announced that fact-checkers would be axed in the UK. Read more at www.snipca.com/53503.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

This is Mi-Mo, a six-legged walking table lamp from Japanese firm Jizai. It's stylish and has a cute shuffle (see www.snipca.com/53493), but the only person who'd ever need it is a nocturnal reader who wanders around the home unable to find a light switch.

IN BRIEF

VLC MEDIA PLAYER ADDS LIVE SUBTITLES

You'll soon be able to get live subtitles on videos in VLC media player. Its developers demonstrated the new technology at the CES 2025 show in January, showing Ricky Gervais being translated into Hebrew. It's powered by AI, and doesn't require you to be connected to the internet. VLC hasn't said when it'll be added to the software, though reports suggest it might be with version 4.0, expected later this year.

TALKTALK SCRAPS NOW TV DISCOUNTS

TalkTalk no longer lets new customers add Now TV to their broadband bills. This also means it has scrapped its discounted streaming deals, which offered Now's packages for less than their usual price. The option will continue for existing subscribers, but will be phased out later this year. Read more on TalkTalk's forums: www.snipca.com/53457.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

Are you Facebook friends with Liv – a 'Proud Black queer momma' (pictured)? No? What about Grandpa Brian, 'Becca the Dog Lover' or 'Angie the Fitness Enthusiast'? These were all AI-generated bots designed to keep you engaged, but led to a backlash from users who felt they were patronising, banal and pointless. Facebook has now scrapped them all.

Court rejects man's claim to recover £598m Bitcoin hard drive

A judge has dismissed a man's attempt to sue Newport City Council to recover a hard drive containing a Bitcoin account now valued at £598 million.

James Howells (pictured right) claimed that his former partner accidentally threw away the hard drive containing the cryptocurrency in 2013. He wanted permission to locate it on a landfill site owned by the council, or seek £495m in compensation.

But the High Court agreed with the council's request to reject the case. Judge Keyser KC ruled that there were no "reasonable grounds" for the claim, and "no realistic chance" of it succeeding at trial.

Howells, 39, bought the cryptocurrency for almost nothing in 2009, but forgot about it when he put the drive in a drawer after he spilled drink on it.

When the price of Bitcoin began to soar after 2013 he hired a team of experts to search for and recover the hard drive.

He claims to have identified an area of the landfill site containing over 100,000 tonnes of waste where he believes the hard drive is buried.

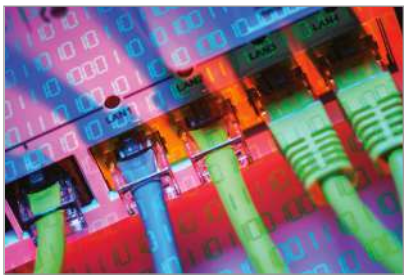
Howells has repeatedly asked permission from the council for access to the site, and offered it a share of the missing Bitcoin if it was successfully recovered.

He called the ruling a "huge injustice". "I'm willing to share the proceeds, but no one in power will talk to me," he added.

James Goudie KC, representing the council, argued that the hard drive became the council's property when it entered the landfill. He also noted that environmental laws prevented any excavation to search for the hard drive.

The council dismissed the offer to share a percentage of the Bitcoin as an attempt to "encourage risky behaviour".

UK broadband use rose by 10.5% in 2024



Broadband usage across the UK surged by 10.5 per cent in 2024, reaching a total of 103,590 Petabytes (PB) of data – or 103.59 billion gigabytes – according to Openreach.

The UK used 94,722 PB in 2023, which was a nine per cent increase from 2022.

Live football, shopping and gaming remain the biggest drivers of UK broadband consumption, with demand continuing to rise as speeds get faster. Peak usage typically occurs on Sundays between 8pm and 10pm.

Sunday 1 December was the busiest day of 2024, Openreach said, with 405PB being used. This was driven by a combination of Black Friday shopping online and a major update for the popular video game Fortnite.

The second busiest day was Thursday 26 December (367PB), caused by new gaming consoles being used and eight Premier League football games being streamed on Amazon Prime.

Separate Ofcom figures show that Brits used an average of 531GB a month in 2024. This rises to 766GB for people using full-fibre broadband connections.

Are you always online between 8-10pm on Sundays? Let us know: letters@comuteractive.co.uk

Apple users could get £1.5bn in compensation as trial begins

Apple faces paying British consumers over one billion pounds if a court case accusing it of taking too much money from app developers is successful.

In a hearing expected to last until March, consumer-rights lawyers say developers had no choice but to sell their apps through Apple's App Store, which takes a commission of up to 30 per cent.

They claim this forced developers to charge users more for their apps than they otherwise would have.

Apple called the case meritless, saying it overlooks the privacy and security benefits of providing apps through iOS and the App Store.

It also claimed that 85 per cent of apps are free, and many developers qualify for a reduced 15-per-cent commission rate.

But Rachael Kent, the British academic bringing the case, says Apple has made "exorbitant profits" by not letting rival companies offer alternative ways for users to pay for apps.

Her lawyers argue this gave Apple a dominant position that let them impose restrictive terms on app developers and charge excessive commission.

They're seeking £1.5bn in compensation, which would be shared among the UK's 20 million Apple users. You're eligible if you own an iPhone or iPad and spent money in the UK Apple App Store between 1 October 2015 and 15 November 2024.

You also needed to be living in the UK on 5 May 2022, and didn't opt out of the claim by 9 September 2022 and 27 December 2024.

You can sign up for more details on the case at Consumervoice: www.snipca.com/53472.

Amazon planning UK broadband satellite to take on Musk's Starlink

Amazon is planning to launch a satellite broadband service in the UK in a bid to rival Elon Musk's Starlink.

It has given documents to UK regulators that reveal it will seek access to British radio frequencies "over the next one to two years".

It's part of the company's Project Kuiper, which aims to deploy 3,000 satellites worldwide providing high-speed internet access to remote areas.

Amazon told Ofcom that offering satellite broadband in the UK could help "close the digital divide" suffered by UK businesses and people in rural areas.

The firm first plans to use terminals installed on buildings to connect to satellites. If this is successful, it wants to start offering a 'direct to device' service, which would connect phones to satellites.

Regulators will consider Amazon's proposal before deciding whether to approve.

AMAZON TO DELIVER ON FOOT

Amazon will start delivering parcels on foot in a trial in the London boroughs of Hackney, Westminster and Islington. Items will be unloaded from train carriages and then sorted at local delivery centres. It's part of the company's wider effort to cut carbon emissions from its delivery vans. It plans to expand the trial to more cities if it proves successful.

IN BRIEF

FIX DEVICES WHEREVER YOU ARE

You can now buy a smaller and more portable version of iFixit's most popular tech repair kit. The Pro Tech Go Toolkit (pictured) is designed for fixing devices when you're not at home and therefore can't use bigger tools. It contains a 32-bit screwdriver set, including standard Phillips tools and more specialised kit for Apple devices. It's available for £44.99 – see www.snipca.com/53471.

O2 STARTS AXING ITS 3G PHONE SERVICE

O2 will start switching off its 3G services in April, beginning in Durham. The network, which is part of Virgin Media, is the last of the big four networks to start scrapping the service. It says the "vast majority" of customers won't be affected, and it's contacting those that might need support. Read more at www.snipca.com/53476.

CHARGE YOUR PHONE IN SWIPPITT 'TOASTER'

A new device dubbed a 'phone toaster' replaces your battery with a fully charged one. Irish firm Swippitt unveiled the Instant Power System (pictured) at CES 2025 in January. You slot a phone attached to a battery case inside the device, and two seconds later it pops up with a fresh one. It costs $450 (around £380), while each battery case costs $120. For details visit www.snipca.com/53477.

Has Microsoft already abandoned Windows 12?

Its priority now is forcing millions of Windows 10 users to upgrade

Microsoft spent Christmas gazing into its crystal ball and in early January declared that 2025 will be "the year of the Windows 11 PC refresh". That probably made sense to about 20 people worldwide, and they all work in Microsoft's marketing department.

Thankfully it explained more in a blog post (www.snipca.com/53513), claiming "one of the most important pieces of technology people will look to refresh in 2025 isn't the refrigerator, the television or their mobile phone. It will be their Windows 10 PC, and they will move forward with Windows 11."

> "Windows 10 users won't make the leap to 11 if they think Windows 12 is on the horizon"

So, that 'refresh' just means lots of people moving from Windows 10 to 11. Microsoft needs this to happen because the former is still running on more than one billion computers, many of which lack the technical specifications to upgrade.

It's exactly the sort of message you'd expect from Microsoft – upbeat to the point of delusional – but it made many experts wonder what's happened to Windows 12. It was back in July 2022 that Microsoft sources told our sister site Windows Central the company had created a new "engineering schedule" for Windows that would see the return of a three-yearly "release cycle". That would've meant Windows 12 arriving in October 2024, three years after 11. But instead we got the 24H2 update, and what a disaster that has been (see page 62).

We even got in 2022 what may have been a glimpse of Windows 12. In October, during a presentation at Microsoft's Ignite conference for developers, a screen briefly appeared showing a floating search box at the top (1 in our screenshot), weather top left 2, system icons top right 3 and a floating taskbar along the bottom 4.

Sources told Windows Central that this design was meant to improve the system for people controlling it with their fingers on tablets, without making it harder for people on PCs using a mouse and keyboard. Microsoft has had this ambition for years – creating a unified Windows that looks the same across different types of device.

But we've seen no leaks since. It may be because Panos Panay, who was head of Windows and Surface at Microsoft, left for Amazon in 2023. Panay was keen to create a similar Windows experience for users no matter what device they used.

His replacement, Pavan Davuluri, may have similar ideas, but he has more immediate challenges such as the 24H2 fallout and backlash against the Windows timeline tool Recall – which critics have dubbed a "privacy nightmare".

And anyway, what's really done for Windows 12 is the enduring popularity of Windows 10, despite support due to end on 15 October.

THE FACTS

- In early January Microsoft wrote a blog post declaring 2025 to be "the year of the Windows 11 PC refresh"
- It will end support for Windows 10 on 15 October, despite the operating system being used on over one billion computers
- It has never officially confirmed that it's working on Windows 12, but leaks in 2022 reportedly showed an early design of the system

When we first heard rumours about Windows 12 in 2022, Microsoft was hopeful that Windows 11 would soon overtake 10. That would create a natural pathway for millions of 11 users to upgrade to 12 in the following few years.

But Windows 11 is running on only 34 per cent of computers, far below Windows 10's 62 per cent. The latter's market share has even jumped in the past few months. Microsoft needs hundreds of millions of Windows 10 users to make the leap to 11. That's not going to happen if users think Windows 12 is on the horizon.

For now Windows 12 is deader than a dodo's doornail. Microsoft has no choice but to hammer home the urgency of upgrading to Windows 11. And it should ditch the word 'refresh'. Windows 10 users need to upgrade their operating systems, not buy a new brand of toothpaste.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

‘Upgrade your landline’ BT scammers

What’s the threat?

Scammers posing as BT staff are phoning customers to ask them to confirm their personal and payment information so they can upgrade their landline to digital. Some of them know your name and address, and use this to persuade you they’re genuine. If you refuse, they threaten to disconnect your landline, which they claim will also cut your internet connection.

According to *Which?*, the fraudsters add a sense of urgency by claiming the deadline is fast approaching. In recent calls they’ve said you have to act before the end of January. The original deadline was actually the end of December 2025, but in May last year BT pushed this back to the end of January 2027.

How can you stay safe?

First, ignore all requests for payments to switch your landline. Your provider will never ask you for money to upgrade to digital, nor ask you to verify your payment information. They should write to you to confirm when the upgrade will happen and what assistance they’ll offer.

Be aware that scammers will probably try repeating this scam throughout the year, changing the deadlines to hammer home the urgency. Indeed, they’ll no doubt continue this fraudulent activity until the end of 2027, adapting their tactics based on what works.

We wouldn’t be surprised if they revisit a scam from 2023, in which they targeted customers who use personal alarms to contact emergency services. They claimed to be calling from the NHS or a phone company and asked for personal details to help. Bear in mind too that they also call customers’ mobile numbers, not just landlines.

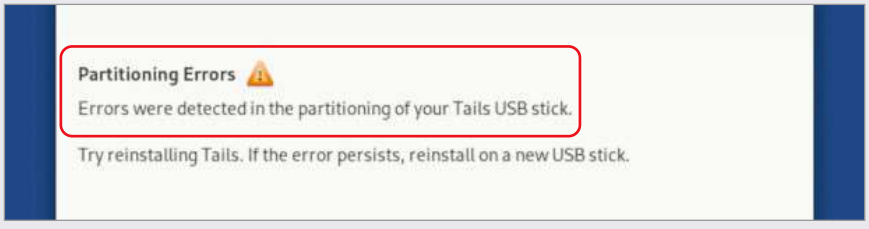
New tools | Detect partition errors in Tails

As we explained back in Issue 651’s How To (page 35), Tails is a privacy-focused operating system that – once installed on a USB stick – routes all internet traffic through the Tor browser, letting you browse the web anonymously.

When you log off, it doesn’t remember anything you’ve done online, though it does have a useful feature called Persistent Storage that keeps your settings, files and data the same across all your browsing sessions.

This might not work if the partitions on your stick are corrupted, so the new version of Tails (6.11), released on 9 January, shows early warnings if it detects problems with your partitions (pictured).

With luck this will give you enough time to recover crucial data before it’s lost. You can download Tails 6.11 from www.snipca.com/53455. It also updates Tor and Thunderbird to their latest versions – read more at www.snipca.com/53456.


Partitioning Errors
Errors were detected in the partitioning of your Tails USB stick.
Try reinstalling Tails. If the error persists, reinstall on a new USB stick.

ScamWatch
Readers warn readers

£3 Great Western Railway ‘UK Annual Pass’

I travel on GWR trains once a week, so my eye was caught by an advert on Facebook promising a ‘UK Annual Pass’ that would give me unlimited travel for just £3. I smelt a rat – how could it possibly be so cheap? Out of curiosity I clicked the link and it took me to a page asking for my personal details. It was made to look like the official GWR site, but I wasn’t convinced. I asked a GWR official on my next journey and they confirmed it’s a well-known scam that’s been around for about a year now. I hope other passengers aren’t fooled.

Gareth Elson

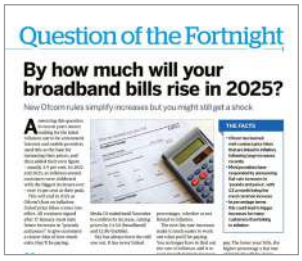
Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Banning mid-contract rises would lead to higher prices

You're probably right to predict that more people will call for a ban on mid-contract price rises in 2025 ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 701, pictured right). But all this will do is force internet providers to increase the upfront cost of the contract.


Question of the Fortnight

By how much will your broadband bills rise in 2025?

Companies need to be able to react to the peaks and troughs of inflation by raising prices, otherwise they'll simply go bust. At the moment, mid-contract rises let companies set increases proportionate to the existing financial circumstances. If Ofcom bans this, it would effectively be asking companies to predict what their running costs will be in two years' time. That's hard for a company to do, so they'll protect themselves by whacking up the basic cost of contracts.

Andrew Fry

A 'device tax' would help pay for electronic waste

Arthur Mansfield misses a crucial point in his Star Letter ('Forcing Amazon to pay 'e-waste' bills will lead to higher prices', Issue 701). He ignores the fact that dealing with the environmental cost of electronic waste is already a financial burden and will only get worse. These costs are huge compared with, say, an extra £50 on the price of a laptop.

A more effective solution would be to implement a 'device tax' on every new product manufacturers make. This would give them an incentive to design products that last longer and can be repaired, while funding recycling efforts.

Neal Proctor

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Microsoft automatically upgraded me to Windows 11

I've been avidly reading your recent articles on the pros and cons of upgrading from Windows 10 to 11. I was in two minds over the upgrade, as I'm sure many of your readers are. With current information about the possibility of extended support for Windows 10 and the likelihood of Windows 12 arriving, I decided I'd stick with Windows 10 at least until next year.

However, while working on my PC recently I suddenly experienced a system freeze followed by the Blue Screen of Death (the first ever on this PC, which I've been using now for over five years). The system reappeared with a 'Stopcode Error' screen message, collected some data and then proceeded to update.

The update continued for some time and then rebooted into Windows 11! You can imagine my surprise. It looks as if Microsoft has made my decision for me.

I'm resigned to the change now. Windows 11 is not that different to 10, but I was wondering whether you or other readers have experienced this.

Rob Cullender

CA SAYS **Yes, many Windows 10 users have complained on Microsoft's forums that their PCs have been automatically upgraded to 11 (see www.snipca.com/53438). Microsoft has acknowledged that flaws in its update procedure can cause this, despite claiming that users will always be asked for permission before installation. For example, there have been cases where Windows Update has mistakenly categorised the Windows 11 upgrade as a mandatory security update.**

In other cases, Microsoft's update prompts are so ambiguous that users accidentally agree to Windows 11 without realising. That may be what happened to Rob. To prevent this in Windows 10 Home, press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click 'Update & Security' followed by Windows Update. Now click 'Pause updates for 7 days' five times to extend this to 35 days. However, you'll need to repeat this process every 35 days. Essential security updates will still be installed automatically.

What will Windows 12's requirements be?

I have an old HP Pavilion laptop running Windows 10, and an even older Windows 10 Zoostorm tower PC. To my amazement I managed to upgrade the Zoostorm PC to Windows 11 using Rufus (https://rufus.ie/en), although I accept this may be unstable or unsafe and I'll need to replace both PCs quite soon. However, I have another concern which has perhaps not been considered. If Windows 12 ever materialises, will the security requirements be even more stringent, leaving recently purchased Windows 11 computers unable to upgrade and therefore unusable?

Neil Howells

CA SAYS **That's a great question. Even though Windows 11's strict requirements**

What's the Issue...?

My New Year's resolution is to finally ditch my SIM card for an eSIM. When did you explain which deals are best?

Ian Harrison

CA SAYS **In Issue 697, page 62.**

I've just downloaded GlassWire (www.glasswire.com) because I want to check whether my neighbours are using my Wi-Fi. When was your feature on the program?

Michael Redmond

CA SAYS **In Issue 691, page 62.**

With 2025 upon us, I need to decide what to do with my three Windows 10 computers. When was your 'Windows 10 is doomed' Cover Feature?

Tony Aslett

CA SAYS **In Issue 693, page 50. Read all three articles on our 2024 Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/53433.**

are limiting the operating system's appeal (it's yet to overtake Windows 10), we can't see Microsoft relaxing them for Windows 12. Compatible PCs will almost certainly require TPM 2.0 and Secure Boot. Perhaps more interesting is whether they'll also need to match Microsoft's Copilot+ standard, which allows them to run AI tasks smoothly.

But that's jumping the gun. We've seen no recent evidence that Microsoft is anywhere near ready to launch Windows 12. Indeed, it recently called 2025 "the year of the Windows 11 PC refresh" – see 'Question of the Fortnight', page 10.

I've caught brain rot from other people

I sadly suffer from chronic 'brain rot', but not in the way you might think (Issue 699, page 8). With people of all ages having their faces glued to one screen another and the unprecedented amount of rubbish on (anti)-social media, everyone around me has been infected with brain rot.

It's got so bad that it's harming my quality of life, social life, human interactions and mental health. It's hard to have any kind of relationship with a brain-rot zombie. So by proxy, *I'm* also suffering brain rot. I can feel my brain dribbling out of my ears! Fellow readers, save yourselves and strive to be better.

Danny Leonard

Trading Standards email helped me get bank refund

In response to Ian Sterling's question in Issue 700's Consumeractive ('Why bother with Trading Standards?'), a few years ago my wife bought a wig from a website, but it wasn't as described or of good quality.

When she tried to return it, the site's online form wouldn't accept her information. I sent them many emails but they kept fobbing me off, so I contacted Trading Standards. They sent a return email acknowledging my complaint and said they'd look into it.

I then sent this email, along with the responses from the company, to my bank, which accepted my claim for a 'Chargeback' refund, and processed it within two weeks. My advice is to provide all correspondence and show you have tried to resolve the problem yourself. This company had an 'office' in London but was registered in Hong Kong.

Robert Lucking

STAR LETTER

Give people choice and they'll abandon Google

I had to chuckle at Google's pathetic response to the US Government asking it to sell Chrome (Issue 701, page 9). The company proposed that users be allowed to change their default search engine once a year. Well, thanks for your generosity, Google – I'm truly grateful!

There should be no default options on devices. All the options should have equal prominence, with simple information explaining what they do. Let people make an informed choice rather than being funnelled toward Google's services without realising it.

The regulators need to be careful, though. There's no point in breaking Google's monopoly only to create another one controlled by a different tech giant. If Apple or Microsoft step into Google's shoes, cutting similar deals with manufacturers to become the default, we'll be back in the same position in a few years.

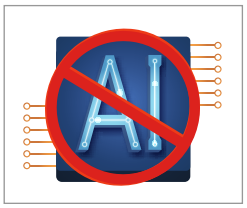
It seems clear that Google's days of dominance are coming to an end. As someone who finds its search results a complete mess, I won't mourn that. I haven't regretted giving up Chrome for Brave, nor Gmail for Proton Mail. I've no doubt millions of others would be glad to switch to these slicker alternatives if only they knew about them. *Computeractive* does a great job of telling readers what's available, but the real turning point will be getting rid of defaults.

I predict that in two years Google will no longer control 90 per cent of online search, and its claim that people use it because they prefer it to other tools will be exposed as delusional. Give people more choice and they'll switch to something better. Simple!

Mick Bracken

The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

Don't be sycophantic towards AI



I've become increasingly frustrated at your sycophantic attitude towards AI. I think you should highlight the dangers and downsides of AI as well as the advantages – which you seem to have extolled at great length.

For instance, I never see you talk about the climate impacts of data centres or the ongoing court cases where AI companies stand accused of training their models on copyrighted works without compensating the people whose work they've used.

You also haven't mentioned the hallucinations LLM tools such as ChatGPT are prone to, which mean you can't take anything it says on trust without checking the information yourself. And what about the fake content such tools can generate, which could have so many profoundly negative effects on society as a whole. These are just a handful of the very real dangers AI poses, and which I think your magazine should be talking about.

Darren George

CA SAYS We have highlighted some of the drawbacks of AI in past issues, such as how criminals can use it to mass-produce online scams, but we take Darren's point that we've haven't covered several other potential dangers.

Overall we're extremely positive about the impact of AI. Tools such as ChatGPT have the potential to benefit society more extensively than the rise of Google did 25 years ago. But we won't shy away from the drawbacks and pitfalls, as we explain in our Cover Feature (page 50).

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights

Can Cash Converters refuse refund for stolen phone?

LEAD CASE

Q Last August, I bought an iPhone from the eBay page of Cash Converters. It worked well until it was blacklisted in early November. Apparently, the phone's IMEI had been registered as lost or stolen. I paid using PayPal and it won't give me a refund. Cash Converters and eBay said I was outside their 30-day guarantee period to get my money back. Currently, I'm out of pocket £570, with no one admitting fault. Is there anything I can do?

Lindsay Rice

A Yes, Lindsay should report the sale to Action Fraud (www.actionfraud.police.uk) and tell Cash Converters that she's entitled to a full refund under the Consumer Rights Act. Under the law, Cash Converters shouldn't be selling any lost or stolen phones, so it is entirely to blame here.

The company's support team needs a crash course in UK consumer law. It told Lindsay that had she bought the phone in store she'd have been entitled to a refund. That's nonsense. No company is allowed to sell lost or stolen goods and must instantly refund customers if caught doing so.

Strangely, Cash Converters did tell Lindsay that it had checked the IMEI number and found the phone wasn't registered as lost or stolen. If the company has the name and address of the person who sold this phone to it, they need to contact the police.

If the phone was found by someone and sold to Cash Converters, they could be guilty of 'theft by finding'. This would partly depend on whether that person made a serious attempt to find the owner.

CASE ONGOING

What are my rights regarding mispriced goods bought online?

Q I'm not clear what my rights are if I see something I want to buy online at a good price and the seller turns around and refuses to sell it to me because it made a pricing error. Don't they have to sell it to me at that price?

John Perkins

A This is always a tricky issue. It depends when the contract is considered legally binding, and the law is still unclear regarding online transactions. For example, entering your payment-card details and getting an email confirming purchase doesn't mean you've entered into a contract with the retailer.

Many retailers have a clause in their policy that means they don't have to honour purchases of goods that have been mispriced. Most courts wouldn't force a website to sell at a price when it's clear a mistake has been made.

If you think you've found a product mispriced, it's best to contact the retailer to confirm. It might even be thankful for you pointing out the error and offer a discount off the normal price as a goodwill gesture.

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

ChatGPT refunds reader who subscribed for two years

OpenAI, which owns ChatGPT, has acted quickly to refund a reader. As we reported in Issue 701, Annette Deschenes thought her husband had paid $20 (£16) for a ChatGPT Plus subscription, so was shocked to see that £580 had actually been taken from her account.

We thought it might be a tricky case to resolve because Annette's husband was buying a subscription for his sister, who lives in Tunisia, and OpenAI is based in the US. Also, OpenAI hadn't actually made a mistake in charging £580 because Annette's husband had mistakenly paid for two years.

Happily, however, OpenAI responded promptly to an email from us explaining the situation. It accepted that Annette's husband hadn't intended to sign up for two years and agreed to refund him. He did lose £10 from the refund to cover the cost of converting money between the three countries. We're trying to find out if this shortfall is covered by UK law.

Overall, we were highly impressed by our first interaction with OpenAI. It acted faster and more reasonably than many companies based in the UK.

If you're interested in subscribing to one of ChatGPT's paid-for packages, visit www.snipca.com/53443 to compare them. Make sure you note the big price difference between Plus ($20 a month) and Pro ($200).

Can I get refund for monitor with faulty pixels?

Q In June 2023, I bought an MSI Optix G2412 monitor (pictured) from Currys. It's been great, but in recent weeks it's developed a fault where lines appear across the bottom of the screen almost like a row of dead pixels. Researching online, I see a lot of people have had this problem, and it might be an inherent fault.

Currys said it couldn't help, but am I eligible for a refund and, if so, from whom? It's not under warranty, so would it be Currys or the manufacturer?

Hefin Davies

A Because Hefin is out of warranty he needs to pursue Currys for help under the Consumer Rights Act (CRA). If the company offers him a refund, it's likely to be partial to reflect how long he's used the monitor. It can instead repair or replace it, but can only do this once, and can't try both options.

We don't know if the fault is inherent, nor whether Currys would consider it serious enough to justify any action. When monitors are made it's common for one or more subpixels to get stuck in an unchanging state – either always off or always on. The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) classifies monitors based on the number of stuck pixels it deems acceptable. Currys might take this into account when deciding how to respond to Hefin.

We've asked Currys to clarify this, and will also check whether the ISO standards supersede the CRA.

CASE ONGOING

Should I receive a refund through my credit card or from Honor?

Q On 5 January, I bought an Honor MagicPad2 tablet (pictured) for £399. It arrived two days later, but I was unable to move files and data to it from my old tablet. Honor has given me no help with this, and is now ignoring me. Should I contact my credit-card company to get my money back?

Michael Taylor

A Yes, but before that Michael should simply ask Honor for a refund. He can do this because when he emailed us, fewer than 14 days had passed since purchase. He then has a further 14 days to return the tablet, and has asked Honor for a returns label in order to do this. He'll have to pay for this return unless he's claiming that the tablet is inherently faulty.

If Honor fails to refund him, Michael should ask his credit-card company for his money back under section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act. The law says that your bank is as liable as the seller if things go wrong – such as the retailer ignoring you.

We're not sure whether Michael being unable to move his files and data means the tablet is inherently faulty. It may be that it simply can't do what he wants it to, or that he's not learned how to do this. Either way, Honor should have done more to help him.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Bosch sent me lawnmower despite expired warranty

In 2023, my son bought me a Bosch lawnmower, which in late summer developed an intermittent starting fault. It was still under warranty, so Bosch collected it for examination, but they couldn't find any fault and returned it.

I wasn't happy, and told Bosch that if the fault reappeared in 2024 I would be out of warranty. Unsurprisingly, it *did* stop working again.

From reading Consumeractive over the years I've learned that if a product has an inherent fault, companies are allowed only one repair or replacement (but not both). I quoted this law to Bosch, and told them that I would accept a repair with a report that confirmed and identified the fault. Days later, I opened my door to find that Bosch had delivered a completely new lawnmower.

John Clark

Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Bosch

- **Email** www.bosch.co.uk/contact
- **Phone** 0344 892 0115

Grow Your Family Tree

As you dive into your family tree it's vital you know where to look for records. **Daniel Booth** explains why you need to...

Research 1974 county boundary changes

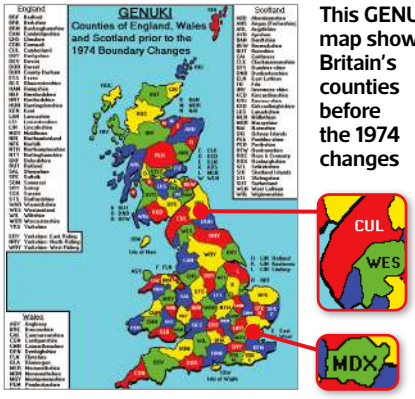
It's essential to know where genealogy records are held or you might end up on a wild goose chase. They are divided into different administrative units, one of the largest being counties – so you need to be aware of changes to county borders. The biggest change in recent years came in 1974 with the Local Government Act, which abolished many traditional counties.

Visit Association of British Counties

Start on the website of the Association of British Counties (ABC, https://abcounties.com), which is dedicated to promoting the UK's 92 historic counties (39 in England, 34 in Scotland, 13 in Wales and six in Northern Ireland). It has an excellent PDF factsheet (www.snipca.com/53474) explaining how the definition of historic counties has changed over the centuries.

For information on a specific county click its link on ABC's County Profiles page (www.snipca.com/53514). When you've clicked through, look on the right for a link to a map of the county, which is hosted on the Gazetteer of British Place Names (https://gazetteer.org.uk).

Next, study this map from GENUKI at www.snipca.com/53507 (pictured above), which is a free resource of genealogy information. It shows you the counties in England, Wales and Scotland before the 1974 changes. The initials for each county are known as the Chapman County Codes (see them all at www.snipca.com/53508). Middlesex (MDX) ceased to exist, while Cumberland (CUL) and Westmorland (WES) were merged to form the new county Cumbria. Huntingdonshire also disappeared, becoming part of Cambridgeshire.



This GENUKI map shows Britain's counties before the 1974 changes

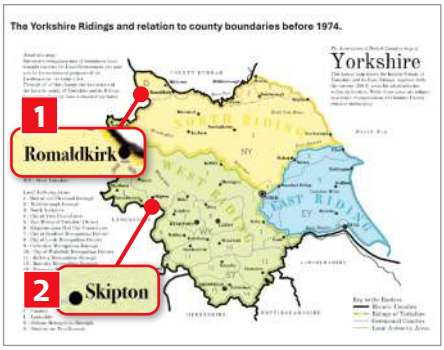
Learn how Yorkshire's boundaries changed

The area that saw the biggest change was Yorkshire, which at the time comprised three Ridings (East, North and West). Most of the area was split into the new counties of North Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire, while much of the east became part of the new county of Humberside, and some parts of the north-east went to the new county of Cleveland. Further changes in 1996 saw Cleveland abolished and the East Riding of Yorkshire created.

These revisions make Yorkshire the perfect area to analyse for this issue's column. Look at the map below (from https://abcounties.com), showing the three Ridings as they were in 1974. We've zoomed the town of Romaldkirk in the northern part of the North Riding (1 in our screenshot below), which was moved into County Durham – so that's where you'd now need to look for records.

Also highlighted is Skipton 2, which moved from the West Riding to North Yorkshire. That means Skipton records are now kept in Northallerton in North Yorkshire even though ancestors would have lived in the West Riding.

You'll find where the UK's original records are held on the National Archives Discovery website (www.snipca.com/53515). For example, typing 'Romaldkirk parish registers' tells us the records are stored at The Story Durham, formerly called Durham County Record Office.



Both Romaldkirk and Skipton moved into new counties in 1974

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I need to print my family tree, but I'm struggling to fit it all on to appropriately sized sheets of paper that my family members can easily read. Is there a program that could help me?

Brian Warner

Yes, you can do this in Gramps, which is free from https://gramps-project.org. Go to the Family Descendant Tree section for options to set your paper size and choose your orientation (landscape or portrait). Choose 'Scale tree to fit the size of the page' to restrict it to one page only, or 'Scale tree to fit page width only' to spread it over several pages.

Have a genealogy question for us? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Next issue: Research ancestors who worked in lead mining

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Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

SCREEN-CAPTURE TOOL

ShareX 17

www.snipca.com/53506
What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

The Snipping Tool feature in Windows 11 is a big improvement on the Windows 10 version, offering more ways to capture the contents of your screen, including the ability to record videos. However, it still pales in comparison to the features and flexibility of ShareX, which – unlike rival screen-capture tools such as SnagIt and FastStone Capture – is completely free to use.

ShareX 17 expands and refines the program's capabilities to make taking screenshots even easier and produce better quality results. For example, when you capture a 'scrolling' screenshot of an entire web page or lengthy document, choose 'Scrolling capture' in the Capture menu to make it ignore the bottom 50 pixels.

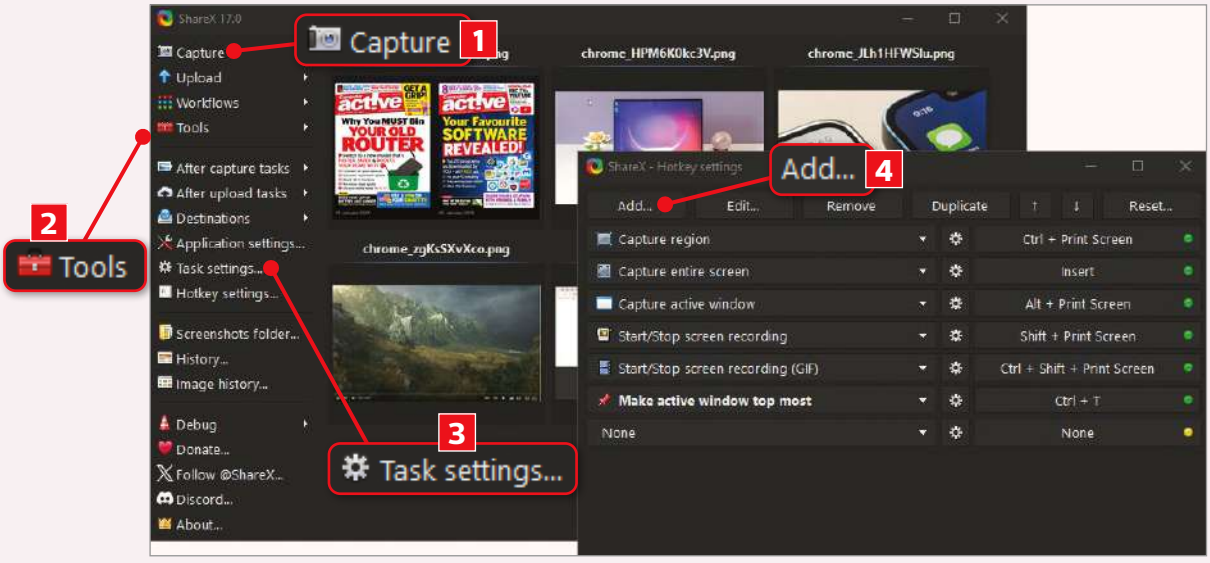
This means images won't include the horizontal scroll bar at the bottom of the program window, saving you the hassle of cropping it out. ShareX now displays a Copy button after capturing a scrolling screenshot, so you can paste the whole thing into an image viewer.

Other welcome additions include sound notifications for more actions, including 'Scrolling capture'. These audio alerts are particularly useful when using ShareX's 'Screen recording' tool, to confirm that you've stopped or paused recording a video. You can turn them off if you'd prefer to capture content in silence – see 3 below.

ShareX's hotkeys let you quickly perform common tasks without needing to select menu options with your mouse. In version 17, you can set up new hotkeys to remove borders from the window you're taking a screenshot of and make it 'top most' (ie, in front of other windows) to capture its content.

Previously, ShareX allowed you to upload screenshots directly to Google Photos, but it has removed this option following changes to Google's API. It still supports lots of other online services, including Imgur, Flickr, Google Drive, OneDrive and Dropbox.

When you install ShareX, it may trigger a Microsoft Defender SmartScreen warning, but it's completely safe to use, so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.



1 Click the Capture menu to access ShareX's wide range of screenshot options. These include Fullscreen, Window, Region, 'Scrolling capture' and 'Screen recording'. You can also set a delay of up to five seconds before a screenshot is taken.

2 The Tools menu includes lots of useful options for editing screenshots, such as applying effects, splitting and combining images, and extracting text using OCR. It also lets you convert videos into different formats and adjust their quality.

3 To disable ShareX's sound notifications, click 'Task settings' and select General, then Notifications. Switch off the options 'Play sound after capture is made', 'Play sound after task is completed' and 'Play sound after action is completed'.

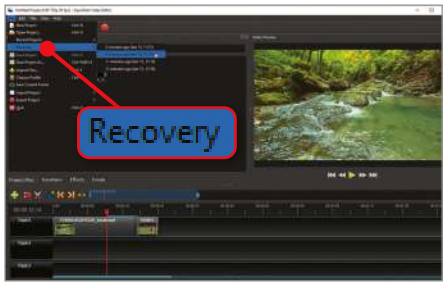
4 ShareX lets you customise and create hotkeys to perform common tasks. Select 'Hotkey settings' to view and change its existing options. To add a new hotkey, click Add, select an action and press the keyboard shortcut to use.

VIDEO EDITOR

OpenShot Video Editor 3.3

www.snipca.com/53500

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11, macOS or Linux



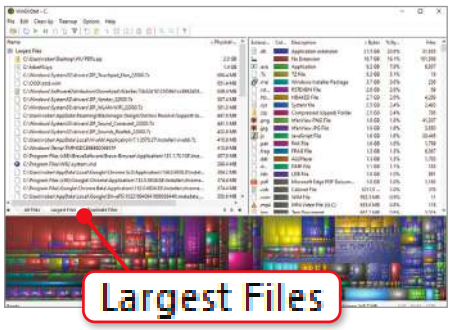
Offering lots of powerful features in a simple interface, OpenShot is one of our favourite free video editors and this new version adds even more useful tools. These include improvements to its 'ripple slice' option, which trims and closes the gaps between video clips. This now supports multiple layers on your timeline and can be controlled using keyboard shortcuts, as well as by right-clicking and choosing Slice. To quickly delete a clip and remove the space it leaves behind, press Shift+Delete. OpenShot now lets you drag and drop multiple files to your timeline in one go, and automatically 'snaps' them into place. It also has a new Recovery option in its File menu (see screenshot), which provides instant access to auto-saved projects, and has enhanced its zoom tool so you can make more precise edits.

DRIVE-SPACE ANALYSER

WinDirStat 2.2.0

www.snipca.com/53501

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11



Since its revival last October (see Issue 696, page 18), WinDirStat has been frequently updated with new and improved features. Version 2.2.0 adds a handy Largest Files tab to the program's interface, directly below the main folder list (see screenshot). Click this to see which files are taking up the most space on your hard drive – these are listed in descending order of size, with the biggest storage hogs at the top. Select an item and either move it to the recycle bin or permanently delete it by clicking one of the bin icons on the toolbar. WinDirStat has extended its Treemap (which provides a colour-coded visual guide to space usage on your PC) to include colours for even more file types. It has also boosted the accuracy of its duplicate-file scans and now shows file-extension details for the results.

£ SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

AnyViewer Professional

www.snipca.com/53505

Price: $43 (£35) per year

Free trial: N/A

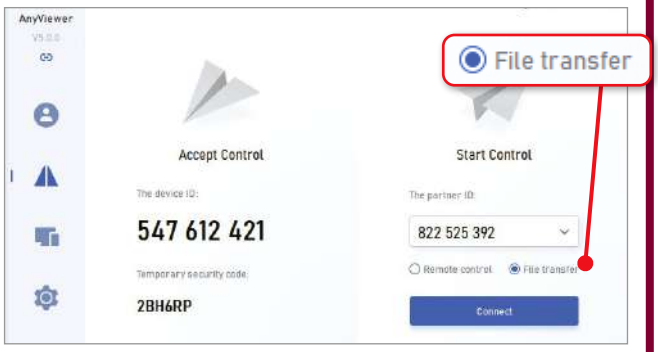
What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11, or macOS

Remote-access tool AnyViewer makes it easy to control other PCs from afar, whether you want to retrieve important information, perform tasks such as installing updates or help someone fix a technical problem. Its free version is impressively versatile and easy to use, but might the Professional edition be better suited to your needs?

Once the host and remote PCs are connected, you can view and control the latter as if you were sitting in front of it. That simple and very useful functionality is available in both versions of the software, as is the ability to transfer files from one PC to the other (see screenshot), provided you're signed into your AnyViewer account. However, the Professional edition offers faster transfers, which will make a difference if you regularly move large files around.

It also offers superior image and video quality (up to 60fps), and colour accuracy, though the free version's view is clear enough to see everything you need. A more desirable option is the Privacy Mode, which blacks out the screen of the remote PC and disables its keyboard to stop anyone interfering with your session.

In the free program, you can use three host devices and control up to 10, which will be enough for most people. AnyViewer Professional increases these limits to 10 and 100 respectively, and allows for unlimited simultaneous sessions (you only get two for free).



OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it

For home users, the free version of AnyViewer offers more than enough tools for accessing PCs remotely. Although it lacks the Privacy Mode, it lets you lock the distant device when you disconnect, and places no limits on file transfers other than speed.

What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

How can I edit my camcorder tapes?

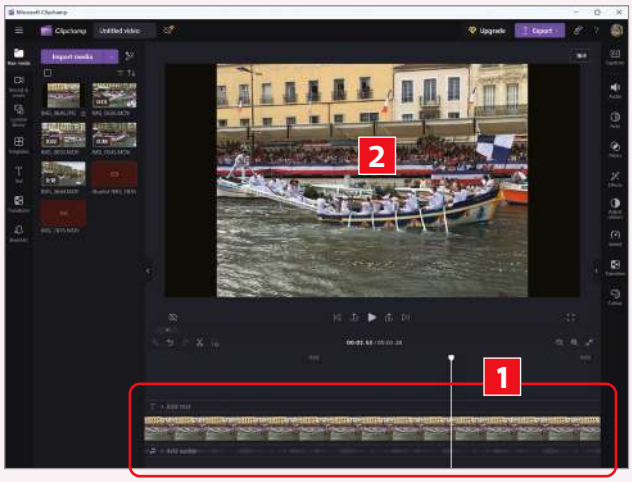
Q I've got a lot of camcorder tapes I'd like to edit and save to DVD or USB stick. Could you recommend a free (or reasonably priced) program to help me?

Tom Hanratty

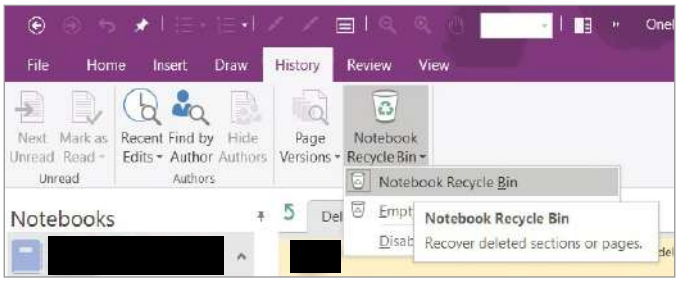
A Have you tried Microsoft Clipchamp? It's probably on your computer already if you're running Windows 11, but if not you can download it for free from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/53422). It's easy to use and has many of the standard video-editing elements, including a timeline on to which you can drag video clips (1 in our screenshot), a preview window where you can see the film as it comes together 2, and various cut and transition tools. Once you've mastered these simple features, you can transfer much of what you've learned to other more advanced editing software.

A more pertinent question, though, is how you'll get the raw footage on to your computer in the first place. If your camera didn't come with transfer software, you could try importing your videos using OBS Studio (free from www.obsproject.com). Connect your camera through its USB port if it has one, or if it uses memory cards rather than tapes insert them into a reader and they will behave like external drives.

You could also try using a USB video capture device to convert from an HDMI output to USB (again, as long as your camera supports HDMI). Consider something like the Balabaxer 4K Audio Video Capture Card, which costs around £11 on Amazon (www.snipca.com/53425).



What's the best alternative to Google Keep?



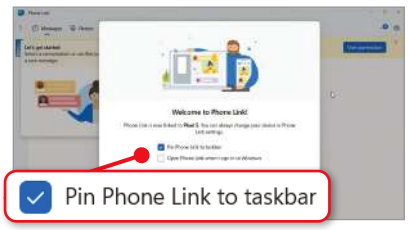
Q I accidentally deleted a list I'd spent all year compiling on Google Keep. I then discovered there's no 'undo' feature, and nor could I recover an earlier version. Is there an alternative that does offer recovery options?

Roy Knowles

A Yes, try Microsoft OneNote, which is available for Windows PCs, phones, tablets and the web (www.onenote.com). It lets you create multiple digital notebooks and organise their pages into sections. Microsoft explains how to recover deleted notes at www.snipca.com/53426 (pictured). We use OneNote for notes we need to refer to regularly, but for quickly jotting down a thought we prefer Simplenote (www.simplenote.com).

Is there an alternative to Samsung's Smart Switch?

Q I've been using Samsung phones for many years, and have always used its Smart Switch to sync my calendar and back up the phone. However, since January 2024 the app keeps crashing. What else can I use?



Brian Loxley

A Smart Switch is primarily designed to help you move data from an old phone to a new one. Once you've done that, look at other options for day-to-day use. Samsung recommends using the Phone Link app (pictured) built into Windows 10 and 11 (see www.snipca.com/53432). Also look at using online services to host your calendar so it's always synchronised with your phone. Samsung's own Calendar app works with Google Calendar, for example.

Named & Shamed

Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

SOFTWARE WARNING!

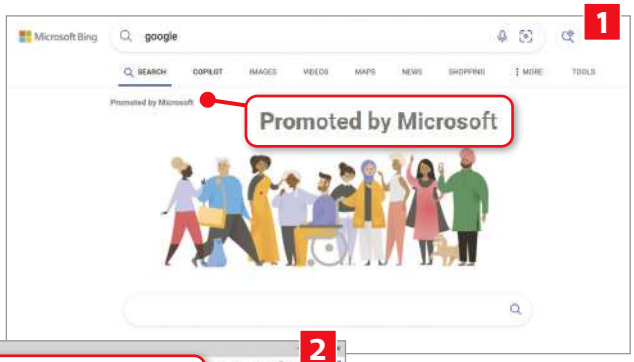
Bing caught cross-dressing as Google

Microsoft is so pleased with recent AI improvements to its search engine Bing that it's desperate for you to try it – even if that means tricking you into thinking you're using Google instead.

Many people spotted this just after Christmas, while searching for Google on Bing, using either Edge or Chrome. It produced a results page that looked strangely similar to Google's home page, rather than the usual Bing results page. I mean, just look at that image at the top (see screenshot 1). If that's not a deliberate attempt to copy Google's famous doodles, then I'm a pink squirrel called Colin. There's no mention you're using Bing apart from 'Promoted by Microsoft'.

What happens is that as the page appears, it automatically scrolls down enough to hide Bing's logo, settings and toolbar. Confused, I had to scroll back up to see the URL confirming its Bing (see screenshot 2), with a message asking you whether you want to keep using Edge.

If this isn't Bing aping Google's doodles then Keumars is a pink squirrel called Colin



Scroll back up and you'll see it's definitely a Bing page

Parisa Tabriz, Google's vice president of Chrome at Google, got it spot on when she wrote on X (www.snipca.com/53464): "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but Microsoft spoofing the Google homepage is another tactic in its long history of tricks to confuse users & limit choice. New year, new low." Microsoft should be embarrassed by such pathetic behaviour.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Lenovo

www.snipca.com/53449

"Lenovo announced the latest additions to its Lenovo Legion ecosystem of gaming devices, accessories, and software today at CES 2025, delivering a deep bench of devices across a wide range of form-factors that give gamers of all levels powerful options to game their way in pursuit of 'reaching their impossible'."

WHAT THEY MEAN

If gamers really want to "reach their impossible" they should start by trying to understand our increasingly nonsensical press releases.

KEUMARS' VILLAINS OF THE FORTNIGHT

SIM farmers

You won't find Emanuel Oxford-Faparusi (left) and Syrus Johnson-Faparusi (right) working long hours to make sure Britain gets a bumper crop of SIM cards this year. Instead, as SIM farmers they signed up to numerous cheap networks that offered free or unlimited calls and texts, then bombarded people with scams.

With fellow Londoner Uchechukwu Orjih, they posed as bank staff and tricked victims into moving their money into a 'safe' account because their normal account had been hacked. This scam earned them £223,000 between August 2022 and March 2024.

Police identified Oxford-Faparusi as the ringleader. When they raided his home they found devices containing 160,000 sets of personal and financial data from victims. He's now serving 42 months behind bars, while Johnson-Faparusi received 18 months. Orjih received a 21-month sentence, suspended for two years.

MINI PC | **£193** from Geekom www.snipca.com/53402

GMKtec NucBox G6

Box office

If you're thinking about buying a mini PC and looking for the kind of power you'd get from a laptop or desktop PC, you should consider a powerful model such as our current favourite, the Geekom A8 (£649 for the 1TB version from www.snipca.com/51157 – see page 32). This will smoothly handle most computing tasks – from managing documents to editing videos.

> "A small price to pay for a surprisingly powerful mini PC with ports aplenty"

However, if your needs are more modest and you don't want to spend this much, there are other options like GMKtec's NucBox G6. Costing less than £200, this pleasing little machine is perfectly capable of managing office work, emails and web browsing.

The G6 is built around the AMD Ryzen 3 5425U processor. That's a switch from its predecessor, the NucBox G5 (£200 from www.snipca.com/52393, reviewed in Issue 696), which uses an Intel N97 processor.

The 5425U chip is three years old, and sits at the bottom of AMD's range. That said, it's a surprisingly powerful processor that can handle basic Windows 11 needs, as long as you don't need to push things too hard. GMKtec has teamed this chip with a generous 16GB of RAM and a fairly nifty 512GB SSD.

As you'd expect at the price, when running more demanding jobs, the G6 runs at around one third of the speed of the pricier Geekom A8. That's not bad considering it's less than a quarter of the price. And it outperforms the G5 in these resource-heavy tests, though in basic Windows performance, the G5 and the G6 were actually neck and neck.

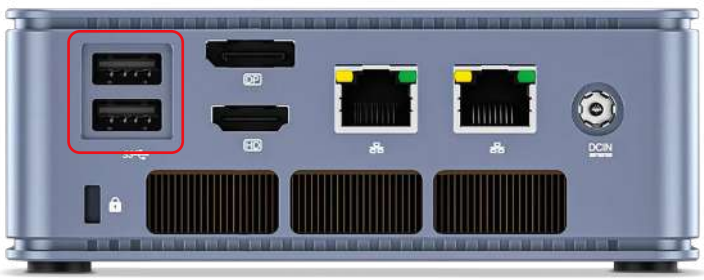
Where the G6 pulls ahead of the G5 is in graphical performance, with the AMD processor's built-in graphics proving more powerful than the G5's. We still wouldn't recommend this device for serious gamers or video editors, but you can dabble if your needs are limited.

The G6 offers a fairly impressive selection of connections. It lets you connect to a monitor via HDMI, DisplayPort or USB-C. Its one USB-C port is on the front panel along with two USB 3.2 ports (pictured above); there are two USB 2.0 ports on the rear (pictured below).

Wireless connectivity comprises Wi-Fi 6E and Bluetooth 5.2. The case is made of hard plastic, rather than the metallic enclosures you'd find on more expensive models, but it still feels strong and robust.

The setup is fast and straightforward – the tiny size of the machine means it can be easily positioned on a desktop. As is standard, there's a VESA mount in the box if you want to attach it to the back of a screen or on a wall.

For general Windows work this PC is a bit of a bargain and handles light loads well. If you prefer to push your PC a bit harder, though, it's worth spending more on a better-equipped model such as the Geekom A8.



SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core AMD Ryzen 3 5425U processor • 16GB RAM • AMD Radeon graphics • 512GB SSD • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.2 • 2x 2.5Gb Ethernet ports • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.2 ports • 2x USB 2.0 ports • Windows 11 Pro • 52x129x126mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53402

VERDICT A budget mini PC that's perfectly capable of basic Windows 11 tasks, such as handing office software and web browsing

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8 £649
Significantly more expensive, but its impressive power makes it a better option if you want to run more demanding software

LAPTOP | **£599** from Samsung www.snipca.com/53445

Samsung Galaxy Chromebook Plus 15.6in 5

Command system

Chromebooks run Google's ChromeOS operating system, which is more secure and easier to navigate than Windows. However, you can't install traditional Windows software on them, only selected apps from the Google Play app, and browser extensions from the Chrome Web Store. But the idea is to avoid downloads completely and use online tools only, such as Gmail and Google's online office software, including Docs, Sheets and Slides.

> "The most powerful Chromebook we've tested to date – by a significant margin"

Samsung's Galaxy Chromebook Plus lies at the more expensive end of the range, but you get a classy and luxurious machine for your money. The metallic case has an attractive, dark-blue matte finish, while it's extremely thin (11.8mm) and weighs a very portable 1.2kg.

Its AMOLED screen is a real highlight, with stunning contrast; an impressive 99-per-cent coverage of the DCI-P3 colour standard; and a peak brightness of 400cd/m², which is plenty for every lighting condition you might encounter other than blazing sunlight. Resolution is a tad low at 1920x1080 pixels, but then again ChromeOS is not really designed to accommodate more than one thing on screen at any one time.

The Chromebook Plus is available in two versions, each with a different processor. Our review unit has an Intel Core 5 120U chip (with 10 cores), while the Core 3 version (with six) costs £100 less. Both handle ChromeOS well, but we liked the faster performance of our review model – and it should stay fast for longer. In fact this is the most powerful Chromebook we've tested to date – by a significant margin.

Battery life is also impressive. In tests that simulate office work, it lasted over 11 hours, which is surprisingly good for a laptop with such a high-quality screen.

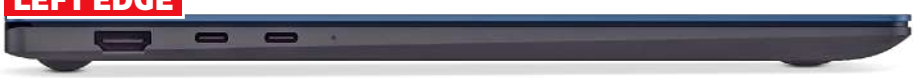
It's a pleasure to type on, too, with large, firm keys including a sizeable Enter key and number pad. The cursor keys are spaced out well, with no function doubling. We also love the huge, glass-coated trackpad, which is smooth and responsive.

Samsung even gets connectivity right, with two USB-C ports and an HDMI socket on the left, while there's a USB 3.2 port, microSD card slot and 3.5mm audio jack on the right. Wi-Fi 6E and Bluetooth 5.3 provide wireless options.

SPECIFICATIONS

Ten-core Intel Core 5 120U processor • 8GB RAM • Intel Arc graphics • 15.6in 1920x1080-pixel AMOLED screen • 256GB SSD • 1x HDMI port • 2x USB-C ports • 1x USB 3.2 port • MicroSD card reader • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Chrome OS • 11.8x355x226mm (HxWxD) • 1.2kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53445

LEFT EDGE



RIGHT EDGE

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *Maximum PC*, *PC Pro* and *T3*, and the websites Laptop Mag (www.laptopmag.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT With an attractive design and excellent performance levels, this luxurious Chromebook is the best we've ever reviewed

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Lenovo IdeaPad 5i Gaming Chromebook Plus £799 This alternative is more expensive, but offers a larger 16in screen and a higher resolution of 2560x1600 pixels

LAPTOP-TABLET | **£183** from Chuwi www.snipca.com/53435

Chuwi Hi10 X1

Cheap as its chips

Most people looking for a new tablet will typically think of an iPad or Android device. Windows enthusiasts now have a third option, with the release of this low-price laptop-tablet from Chinese manufacturer Chuwi.

The Hi10 X1 is fairly chunky compared with Apple and Android rivals with similar-sized 10in screens. It measures 164x245x10.1mm (HxWxD) and weighs a hefty 610g. This is due in part to its aluminium frame, which ensures the device looks stylish and will survive the odd knock. In fact, the build quality is exceptionally good for the price, making it feel like a premium product when you pick it up.

> "A low-cost Windows tablet that's ideal for basic work on the move, but struggles with more demanding tasks"

Along one edge you'll find two USB-C ports and a MicroHDMI port. On the other is a USB 2.0 port and a standard 3.5mm audio jack. Wireless connectivity is covered by Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.2.

The 10.1in screen is fully touch-sensitive, with a resolution of 1280x800 pixels and a 16:10 aspect ratio. Overall, its IPS panel offers decent brightness, contrast and sharpness, though we noticed some unevenness in colour quality and brightness levels across the screen.

It's powered by an Intel N100 processor, along with 8GB of RAM and 256GB of storage. This 12th-generation processor is one of the lowest-powered chips you can get these days, but it's what we'd expect for the price.

In performance tests the Hi10 X1 lagged well behind any Windows 11 laptop we've reviewed recently. We also tried it with office software, web browsers and email tools, and while they sometimes took some time to load, they all ran fairly smoothly, as long as the tasks weren't too demanding.

Loading a basic spreadsheet is fine, for example, but the tablet slows noticeably when handling more complicated jobs. You wouldn't want this to be your main computer, but it's a perfectly capable portable device for doing a bit of Windows work on the move.

Given the Hi10 X1 copes so well with simple office work, we recommend the bundle with the keyboard case, which the URL above takes you to. It's available without the case for £24 less, but we think the addition of a keyboard is well worth the extra money. The case offers extra protection and comes with a kickstand that props it up in an upright position. A magnetic clip attaches the keyboard to the tablet.

This connection isn't sturdy enough for you to use on your lap like a laptop, but it's fine when working at a desk. The keys are well-weighted, quick and responsive, offering a comfortable typing experience. We also liked the trackpad, which while pretty small supports multi-gesture control. With this and the touchscreen, you have plenty of options for navigating Windows.

Our main disappointment is with the battery life. In our tests the Hi10 X1 lasted just four hours when carrying out office work. That's a lot less than we'd expect from a tablet or laptop.

The cameras are adequate, but you wouldn't want to rely on them for any important snaps or video calls. The main camera has only eight megapixels and will almost certainly be outclassed by the camera on your smartphone. The five-megapixel front-facing camera is fine for video calls and online meetings, but the quality isn't great so make sure you use it in well-lit conditions.

SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core Intel N100 processor • 8GB RAM • 10.1in 1280x800-pixel IPS touchscreen • 256GB storage • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.2 • 2x USB-C ports • 1x USB 2.0 port • 1x MicroHDMI port • Windows 11 Home • 164x245x10.1mm (HxWxD) • 610g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53435

VERDICT An incredibly cheap Windows 11 tablet that's adequate for browsing, email and office work, but pricier models will run faster

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Microsoft Surface Pro £985 At the other end of the price scale, this is a full Copilot+ tablet PC with a much better processor and a price to match

PRINTER | **£163** from Printerland www.snipca.com/53462

Canon i-Sensys LBP243dw

Prints charming

It's hard to get excited about a mono laser printer, but Canon's i-Sensys LBP243dw has more going for it than most. Inside its compact and unassuming shell lurks a truly capable printer that's extremely well suited to modest home-office jobs.

For the money, the LBP243dw offers a reasonable specification. It combines a 250-sheet paper tray with an additional 100-page multipurpose feed, making it more versatile than cheaper laser models with just a single tray. It supports automatic double-sided printing and connects to your network via Wi-Fi or Ethernet. It doesn't have a colour touchscreen, but its five-line mono display still makes it easier to control than many more basic printers.

> "A versatile mono laser printer that's quick out of the blocks and cheap to run"

Mono laser printers are usually fast out of the blocks and the LBP243dw was very keen to get going. In our tests it delivered a first page of text in seven seconds, needing only an extra second when starting up from cold.

Once into its stride it achieved an impressive 32.6 pages per minute (ppm) with a 25-page text document, which included the time taken to spool the job. We also tested it with a 50-page document and its speed edged up to 33ppm.

Unsurprisingly, the LBP243dw wasn't quite so nifty in our complex graphics test, reaching a top speed of 21.5ppm. It

was faster when printing on two sides, managing 14.6ppm.

Print quality is strikingly good, producing exceptionally bold black text with extremely fine character outlines. You might not expect great graphics from a laser, but here the LBP243dw is a welcome surprise. It's one of the best mono lasers we've tested for graphics quality, with no banding and barely visible dither patterns (used to create different shades). With excellent shading control and accurate exposure, photos and business graphics were accurate and eye-catching.

It comes with only a 1,500-page starter toner, but you can replace this with a high-capacity cartridge that's good for 10,200 pages, though that costs around £170. That said, this works out at a very reasonable 1.4p per page, making this an affordable printer to run over the longer term.

SPECIFICATIONS

5-line mono LCD display • 250-sheet main tray paper capacity • 1200x1200dpi print quality • Auto-duplex • USB, Ethernet or Wi-Fi connection • 249x399x373mm (HxWxD) • 9.5kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53462

VERDICT A reasonably priced mono laser printer that's fast and produces high-quality results

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE HP LaserJet Pro 3202dw £243 A decent alternative if you need a laser printer that produces colour documents

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

pOLED

What is it?

POLED is a type of AMOLED screen, which is increasingly being used in mobile phones. First used for screens in folding phones and smartwatches, it's now common on phones with fixed screens. This is because they're becoming cheaper to make, and can be fitted with smaller bezels, thanks to their ability to bend around edges. As a result they've started to appear on low-cost phones, such as the Motorola Edge 50 Fusion (£280 from www.snipca.com/52997, reviewed in Issue 699, pictured).

How does it work?

All screens are built from several layers of material. In standard AMOLED screens, one of these layers – called the substrate – is made from glass. However, to produce bendy glass manufacturers of folding phones needed a flexible alternative. They settled on pliable plastics, including polyethylene terephthalate (PET) and polyethylene naphthalate (PEN). The 'p' in pOLED stands for 'plastic'.

What are the specs?

Most pOLED panels are manufactured by LG Display, and you'll find them on foldable phones and Apple's smartwatches. Resolutions and other factors may still vary, but look out for the pOLED name in a phone's technical specifications.

Can I change it later?

You can exchange a broken screen on some phones, but you can't upgrade it to a better version. You'll need either to buy the same panel directly from the manufacturer or a third-party replacement that's made for your particular model.

SECURITY CAMERA | **£90** from Amazon www.snipca.com/53451

Blink Outdoor

Guard your home and your wallet

The Blink Outdoor is a small, hardy and low-cost security camera designed to keep an eye on the front or back of your house. With an ingress rating of IP65 it can cope with all weather and has a simple square design that's perfect for placing up in the corner of a roof or sitting on a window sill. It comes with a bracket that makes it easy to install.

It also has Blink's Sync Module 2 (pictured below left), a separate unit that helps to connect it to Wi-Fi and can accommodate a USB stick up to 256GB to store footage, meaning you don't have to pay for an online-storage subscription.

Setup via Blink's smartphone app is easy. You're prompted to open a Blink account and link to an existing Amazon account. Next, pair the camera with the Sync Module. You can place this anywhere in your home, but it does need to be plugged into a mains socket.

> "A low-cost security camera with built-in storage options"

After setup, we could check in at any time on its constant live feed. This is a decent 1080p stream, though is a little grainy, and some motion is blurred. The two-way audio sound quality isn't terrible, but isn't crystal clear either. Motion-triggered notifications are available with the free service, but motion-event recording, live view recording and person detection are restricted to paid subscriptions, which start from £2.50 a month.

Motion detection is reliable and you can turn up the sensitivity level in the settings. Person detection is fairly good too, and you can adjust privacy zones in the app, but these are limited to a selection of rectangular zones on the screens. Any privacy zones will be completely greyed out.

You may be disappointed with picture quality if you want a replacement for a premium camera from Ring or Eufy, but the 1080p resolution is perfectly fine for a basic security camera, and selecting the 'best picture quality' setting will resolve some problems with motion blur. While some footage we captured was lacking in detail, it was never unusable.

Its best feature is a phenomenal two-year battery life, powered by two easy-to-replace AA batteries.

SPECIFICATIONS

1080p resolution • 143-degree diagonal field of view • Black-and-white night vision • Two-way audio • Subscription-free option with built-in storage • 70x70x41mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty

www.snipca.com/53451

VERDICT A decent outdoor security camera that doesn't need an online-storage subscription

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE Arlo Essential 2K Outdoor Security Camera £110 A higher resolution gives added sharpness and better-quality footage

WHAT SHOULD I BUY? We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best device for monitoring heart rate?

Q My wife would like to be able to monitor her heart rate and keep a record of the data for health reasons, rather than fitness. Devices like the Fitbit seem to be aimed specifically at checking athletic performance, and we wonder whether this would be suitable.

My wife has had her heart properly monitored by her GP, but for peace of mind, she'd like to have something that can continuously monitor this.

Alan Thomas

A We can't recommend that you rely on a smartwatch or fitness band to gather information for critical medical purposes, but they are certainly suitable for keeping tabs on your heart rate.

We think a fitness band is a better option for your wife than a smartwatch because they can be comfortably worn all day and night and the battery life tends to be longer.

The Fitbit Charge 6 (£99 from www.snipca.com/48198, reviewed in Issue 671, pictured) is our current favourite. It constantly monitors heart rate and lets you check this data and view historical results as a graph in the Fitbit app.

You can also set the app to alert you with a notification should your heart rate suddenly speed up while you're relatively inactive.

Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Chillblast
HIGH PERFORMANCE PCs

Start the new year with an Edge

Set yourself up for success by investing in a Chillblast Edge PC for the new year. Use our intuitive configurator to spec your perfect custom build or choose a pre-built high-performance PC. Each PC will be expertly built, fully tested then guaranteed by the UKs PC manufacturer of the year.

chillblast.com
GAME.CREATE.WIN

PC PRO TECHNOLOGY EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2024
WINNER
BEST PC MANUFACTURER

MOUSE | **£159** from Amazon www.snipca.com/53447

Razer Basilisk V3 Pro 35K

Clicks into place

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

This latest addition to Razer's mouse range looks expensive – and it is – but it's also packed with the latest technology. Its headline feature is a scan resolution of 35,000dpi, making the mouse extremely sensitive. A higher resolution means the mouse is more accurate, making it ideal for playing games, but it's also useful for general Windows use, especially when performing fiddly tasks such as photo editing and working on spreadsheets.

It has a rechargeable battery that Razer claims will last around 140 hours. We tested it for around 100 hours, during which it dropped from 80 per cent charge to 15 per cent, so the claim is well founded.

The unit has 11 programmable buttons, but the most interesting is the scroll wheel. Razer calls this a Smart-Reel, and it switches between smooth scrolling and a clicky, ratcheted feel depending on how you use it. Scroll slowly and the ratchet kicks in for greater accuracy. Scroll faster to flick through a long document, for example, and the wheel spins smoothly.

Features aside, this is a high-quality mouse with a comfortable, ergonomic design that's easy to use. Its clicks are quiet and satisfying, it skims smoothly across your mouse mat, and its HyperSpeed wireless 2.4GHz receiver provides a reliable connection to your PC.

SPECIFICATIONS

35,000dpi sensor • 140 hours battery life • 5 memory profiles • Wireless USB dongle supplied • Bluetooth • 43x130x75mm (HxWxD) • 112g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/53447

VERDICT An expensive mouse, but you get a lot for your money

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Logitech Lift Vertical Ergonomic Mouse £47 A cheaper mouse that's also very comfortable to use but doesn't have the same level of accuracy

CHARGING BLOCK | **£46** from Amazon www.snipca.com/53448

Ugreen Nexode Pro 65W Ultra-Slim

Watts up

Computer active RECOMMENDED ★★★★

If you don't have a lot of room around your plug sockets, the Ugreen Nexode Pro 65W Ultra-Slim is a useful space-saving charger. Unlike a chunky charging block, it sits flat against the wall when plugged into a power socket. It sticks out by just 16mm, so you can still use it if your socket is behind furniture such as a desk or sofa.

The unit has three ports arranged along the bottom edge. Two are USB-C, while the other is a standard USB 3.0. The main USB-C port (labelled USB-C1) can charge at the device's full 65W, as long as no other devices are connected. If any of the other USB ports are in use, it shares its power between them. It's more than powerful enough to provide fast charging for most mobile phones.

To test the device we connected a Samsung Galaxy S24 FE, a set of earbuds in their charging case and a music player. The Nexode Pro charged our Samsung phone from zero per cent to full capacity in around 80 minutes, which is what we'd expect from a top-end charger.

Of course, if you want to charge three power-hungry devices (such as modern laptops) simultaneously, this may be a little underpowered, especially as the second USB-C port offers a maximum of just 20W of power when the main port is in use.

It's a perfect device to take on your travels, however, because it comes with a selection of clip-on plugs for different regions, including the UK, US and EU.

SPECIFICATIONS

65W total power output • 2x USB-C ports • 1x USB 3.0 port • 92x49x16mm (HxWxD) • 280g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/53294

VERDICT A useful charging block for up to three devices, with a total output of 65W, making it ideal for travelling and use in small spaces

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Anker Prime Charger 200W £80 More expensive, but this charger maxes out at 200W and has six ports

PC/KEYBOARD | **£85** from The Pi Hut www.snipca.com/53479

Raspberry Pi 500

Fruit machine

When the Raspberry Pi 400 (£57 from www.snipca.com/53478, reviewed in Issue 596) was released in 2020, its computer-in-a-keyboard design evoked much nostalgia for those of us who had Commodore or Sinclair home computers in the 1980s. Four years later, the company has followed it up with the 500, which has a similar design and contains the company's current flagship Raspberry Pi 5 computer. It runs Raspberry Pi OS, which is based on Linux.

> "Basic PC-keyboard hybrid for those who like to tinker on a budget"

You can buy the computer on its own for £85 at the URL above or as part of the Desktop Kit bundle for £113 (www.snipca.com/53480), though at the time of writing the latter was out of stock. The Kit adds a mouse, memory card (for installing the operating system), a 27-Watt power cable, microHDMI-to-HDMI cable and a Beginner's Guide booklet.

As with the 400, all the ports sit on the rear of the case (pictured below), and these include one USB 2.0 for your mouse, two USB 3.2 ports and a microSD card slot. The sole USB-C input only supplies power.

Alongside these are two 4K microHDMI ports and a Gigabit Ethernet socket. There's also a GPIO interface, but if you're interesting in tinkering with additional hardware you'd be better off with the bare-bones Raspberry Pi 5 (£47 from www.snipca.com/53481). Having the ports at the back makes sense. It tidies up the cables, and means there's only one thick edge on the keyboard.

The keyboard is a membrane offering. Its chiclet keys are responsive and work well even under fast typing.

Unlike most standard PCs, there's no SSD – the Linux operating system and all other software and files live on the microSD card or any external storage you might attach. Booting the system from a memory card takes only 20 seconds, but if you're used to an SSD you'll find this incredibly slow.

Still, this new model has significantly more processing power than the 400, which means it can work as a viable desktop PC for those that limit themselves to office and web-browsing tasks. Keep in mind that it can't run Windows, so you'll need knowledge of Linux or an interest in learning it.

SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core Broadcom BCM2712 processor • 8GB RAM • VideoCore VII graphics • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5 • 2x USB 3.2 ports • 1x USB-C port (power only) • 1x USB 2.0 port • 2x MicroHDMI ports • MicroSD card slot • Gigabit Ethernet port • 40-pin GPIO header • 23x286x122mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/53479

VERDICT A more powerful follow-up to Raspberry Pi's 2020 PC-in-a-keyboard device

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Raspberry Pi 5 £47 The standard Pi PC comes without a case or a keyboard, but costs around half the price

DO I REALLY NEED...

Two clip-on laptop screens?

What is it?

Chinese firm Jsaux has launched the FlipGo Horizon Dual Monitor that lets you easily add a screen to each side of your laptop (as pictured).

What does it do?

It comes with two screens and a stand that your laptop sits on. The additional screens attach to the stand using magnets, then connect to the laptop via a single USB-C cable. The extra screens can be used in portrait or landscape mode.

What's the catch?

The product hasn't been launched yet, and price hasn't been revealed. It's expected to arrive on crowdfunding platform Kickstarter soon, then later via Jsaux's own website. See more information at www.snipca.com/53482.

So can I do without it?

This is an incredibly convenient way to carry three screens around with you. This will be more than most people need.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 12 Feb

GMKtec NucBox M5 Plus
An older AMD processor keeps the price down on this capable mini PC

Motorola Moto G75
It may be sleek and stylish, but this affordable phone is tougher than it looks

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

LAPTOP

PRICE DROP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£699 from www.snipca.com/51831
Tested Issue 683

This laptop has the same processor (Intel Core Ultra 7 155H) as our previous favourite (Acer Swift Go 4), but manages to squeeze more speed out of it. It also comes with 16GB RAM, 512GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen. Excellent value overall.

ALTERNATIVE Acer Swift Go 14 Still a fast and powerful laptop, with a great 14in screen. £809 from www.snipca.com/49733

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643

This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £656 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 10.9in
£309 from www.snipca.com/53386
Tested Issue 646

The price of the 10th-generation iPad, released in 2022, has fallen far enough that it's better value than earlier models. If the John Lewis price above has expired, get it for £329 on Apple's site.

ALTERNATIVE iPad mini 7 The 2024 version of the mini improves the colour accuracy on the 8.3in screen and has a more powerful processor. £499 from www.snipca.com/52573

ANDROID TABLET

Honor MagicPad2
£500 from www.snipca.com/53150
Tested Issue 700

With a larger screen (12.3in) than the Galaxy Tab S9 (below) and a similar performance for less money, Honor's MagicPad2 is a superb new tablet. The OLED screen has a strikingly sharp resolution, and yet battery life is a mighty 18 hours.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 Has a much brighter screen than its predecessor, making it ideal for watching TV. Also has a faster processor, speeding up tasks. £599 (128GB) from www.snipca.com/50039

APPLE iPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/53387
Tested Issue 695

This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now discounted to £599 (128GB), this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £599 from www.snipca.com/52411

ANDROID PHONE

Google Pixel 7a
£349 from www.snipca.com/53388
Tested Issue 660

A cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, this uses AI to add clarity to photos, and lasts an impressive 10 hours. Has a fast processor and 8GB RAM to supercharge performance.

ALTERNATIVE Nothing Phone 2a Don't be put off by the odd name. This has a distinctive design, superb camera and decent battery life. From a UK company too. £319 from www.snipca.com/49930

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Our pick of products that have won the Buy It award

MINI PC

Geekom A8
£719 from www.snipca.com/51157
Tested Issue 689

This tiny machine (37x112x112mm) doesn't have much room for ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD, a fast processor and an SD card slot for adding storage. It comes with 32GB RAM, as does a slightly slower model that's typically around £170 cheaper and has only a 1TB SSD. Take your pick.

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox M7 Pro Has an older processor, but comes with plenty of ports and room to add a graphics card. £560 from www.snipca.com/52858

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/52730
Tested Issue 698

The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £200 from www.snipca.com/50192

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Premium
£19.99 from www.snipca.com/33247
Tested Issue 629

Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm NortonLifeLock, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a 10-device, two-year licence. Other versions are available, including Norton 360 for Gamers.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £19.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£60 from www.snipca.com/50751
Tested Issue 608

Despite the name, this webcam is also great for home users. Its standout feature is automatically adjusting itself to keep your picture looking sharp. It offers a 78-degree field of view, which is fine for everyday video chats with one person in front of the camera.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £38 from www.snipca.com/51577

PC MONITOR

PRICE DROP

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£180 from www.snipca.com/51687
Tested Issue 692

An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £229 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£92 from www.snipca.com/52658
Tested Issue 630

In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £92; 2TB costs £168.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £70 from www.snipca.com/37304

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 4...
Anker MagGo Power Banks

Winner of a Recommended award in Issue 699 (page 28), Anker's MagGo Power Bank is a high-quality portable charger that comes with Qi2-certified 15-Watt wireless charging to ensure your devices are fully charged faster than ever. For example, it charges the iPhone 15 from 0 to 50 per cent in just 44 minutes. It also has a USB-C port, meaning you can charge devices using wires.

Its smart screen shows all the information you need, including battery percentages and full-recharge times, so you can keep tabs on your device's charging journey. Like all Anker products, it offers the tech experience you want with zero restrictions.

It works with magnetic phone cases, and has a stand that keeps your phone at the perfect viewing angle so you can watch your screen as it charges. You stay protected and still enjoy continuous power without any hiccups.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/53450 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 11 February. Good luck!

You can buy the **Anker MagGo Power Bank** for £89.99 from www.snipca.com/52909. For more information on Anker products, including chargers for all devices, visit www.anker.com/uk.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830
£250 from www.snipca.com/51715
Tested Issue 676

This has recently risen in price from £180, but it's still better value than the ET-1810 because it adds copying and scanning to its functions for £79 more. Print quality is great, especially for photos, which have crisp details, vivid colours and realistic skin tones.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £140 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

Amazon Fire TV 50in Omni QLED
£500 from www.snipca.com/52542
Tested Issue 694

A fantastic 50in QLED screen with 4K resolution that produces vibrant tones in bright sunlit images and pale, subtle shades in more atmospheric scenes. It provides access to all the streaming services you need, and offers voice control through Alexa.

ALTERNATIVE TCL 32SF540K
Budget TV with a 32in Full HD screen (1980x1080 pixels) and two HDMI ports. £148 from www.snipca.com/52100

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800
£230 from www.snipca.com/52957
Tested Issue 665

This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560
Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £210 from www.snipca.com/52051

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46 Make Windows Better
47 Make Office Better
48 In the Club: Create a timeline for tasks

HOW TO...

Use a text expander to save yourself a lot of typing

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Beeftext **Time required:** 60 minutes

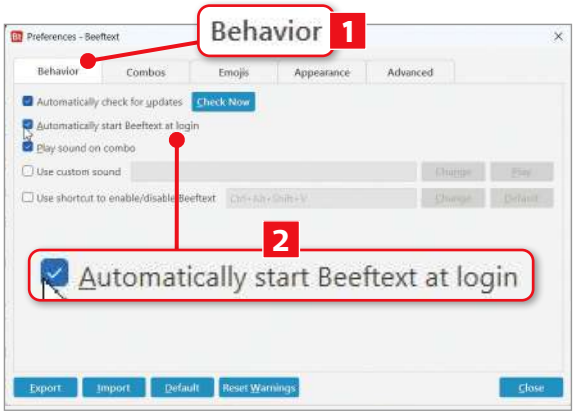
There are many examples of text that we all have to type again and again. Your address and contact information, for example. Another instance might be arrangements for a regular meet-up with friends. Even a quick typist can quickly tire of tapping these details out time after time.

One way to make life easier is to use a free text expander tool like Beeftext (www.snipca.com/53392). Text Expanders work in a similar way to the autocorrect feature in a word processor. Microsoft Word or LibreOffice Writer, for example, can be set to replace 'teh' with 'the' every time you mistype it. They do this automatically as you type because they've been told to watch out for 'teh' and correct it whenever they detect it.

In much the same way, a text expander lets you define equivalents of 'teh' as keywords and set the snippets of text with which they should be replaced. You can do this to correct your typing errors across all programs, not just your word processor. However, its most useful function lets you automatically enter commonly typed passages by typing a single word.

This means you only have to type a passage once, as a 'snippet', then associate it with a keyword. From that point on, the text expander will paste the snippet into your document every time you type the associated keyword.

To do this, your text expander needs to be running in the background. So, to save you having to remember to launch it every time you turn on your computer, open Beeftext, then click File, followed by Preferences. With the Behavior tab selected (1 in our screenshot above), tick the box next to 'Automatically start Beeftext at login' 2.



Set Beeftext to launch when you log into Windows

1 Create your first snippets

The simplest snippets are plain text that you'd otherwise have to type in full. For example, while you can set up a signature for the bottom of your emails containing information you always want to include, there may be times when you want to include a paragraph or two that wouldn't be relevant in every instance. In this case, rather than typing them each time or pasting from another document, you would set up a snippet to type them on your behalf.

Let's assume you often need to provide directions to your house. Open Beeftext and press Ctrl+N to create a new snippet. Type the necessary sequence of directions into the Snippet box (1 in our screenshot below), then click in the Keyword box and type xxdirections 2. Click OK.

Type the full text into the Snippet box, and the shortcut phrase into the Keyword field

Now switch to a program into which you can paste text, such as Windows Notepad. Type xxdirections, and when you press the 's' at the end of the word, your computer will beep twice and the keyword you just typed will immediately be exchanged for the passage of text within your snippet.

Should you ever move house, you can update the snippet by returning to the Beeftext program and double-clicking it in the list of snippets that appears in the main screen.

2 Structure your snippets

You'll notice that we used 'xxdirections' as our keyword. That's because we'd be very unlikely to type that combination of letters in everyday use, which isn't something we can say for the word 'directions'.

You don't need to prefix your keywords with xx if something else would be more appropriate, and neither do you have to keep the same structure for every keyword. But if you don't want to keep having to refer back to the Beeftext interface or a list of keywords you've written, it makes sense to devise a system of your own that makes it easy to remember your keywords, so that using Beeftext becomes second nature.

Your snippets don't have to be plain text, either. You can include what's known as variables, which are placeholder elements that are removed when Beeftext pastes the snippet into your document.

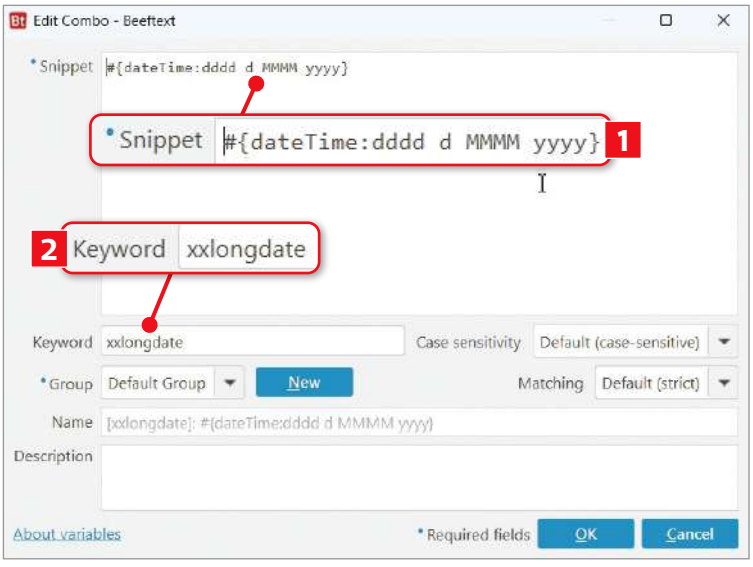
Let's imagine you write a lot of letters, each of which must be dated. It can be difficult keeping track of the date, so open Beeftext then press Ctrl+N and type #{date} into the snippet box. Next, type xxtoday into the Keyword box and click Save.

Having done that ourselves, typing xxtoday into a document replaces the keyword for '17 December 2024' (date at the time of writing). The following day, that date will automatically update itself to 18 December 2024, and so on. If the date isn't formatted as you'd like, that's not a problem, because you can instead use #{dateTime} in place of #{date} and add extra information to the variable to define how the output should be formatted.

What follows is going to sound a little complicated, but don't be intimidated: it's very similar to the codes that are used to format dates on web pages. Click in the snippet box and type #{dateTime:dddd d MMMM yyyy} (1 in our screenshot below), then click in the Keyword box and type xxlongdate 2. Click Save, then switch to Notepad and type xxlongdate, which will immediately be replaced for the current date, with the day of the week at the beginning ('Tuesday 17 December 2024').

The reason this works is that dddd translates to the full name of the day of the week and d is the date without a leading zero (1,2,3 etc). If you used dd the date would always be padded out so it was two characters long. The 9th of the month would therefore be '09', but the following day would be '10', without an additional zero.

MMMM represents the full name of the month, while yyyy tells Beeftext to add the full year, using four digits. As you might have guessed, there are shorter options for each of these, which means you can set up another keyword, like xxshortdate, to produce a truncated version of the current date. In this case, the snippet would consist of #{dateTime:ddd d MMM yy}. So, when you typed xxshortdate into Notepad, an email or a document, it would be replaced by 'Tue 17 Dec 24'.



Include variables in your snippets so you can quickly add live data like dates

3 Use maths for even smarter snippets

When you type these variables into the snippet field, you're using what's known as the Qt system. You can find a list of the various date-based variables that you can work with at www.snipca.com/53279. These define the d, ddd, dddd and so on that you can use as placeholders for formatting the output of the snippet.

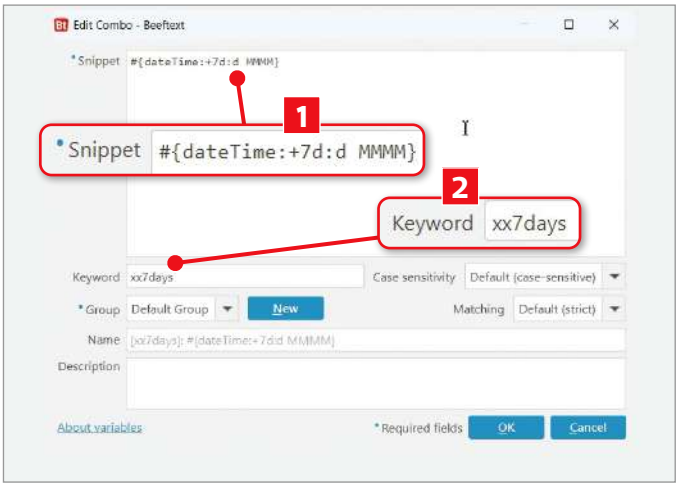
Better yet, because dates are numeric and conform to predictable patterns, you can perform maths on them. So, if you're running a club and you frequently want to ask members to respond to you within, say, a week, you

How I use Beeftext

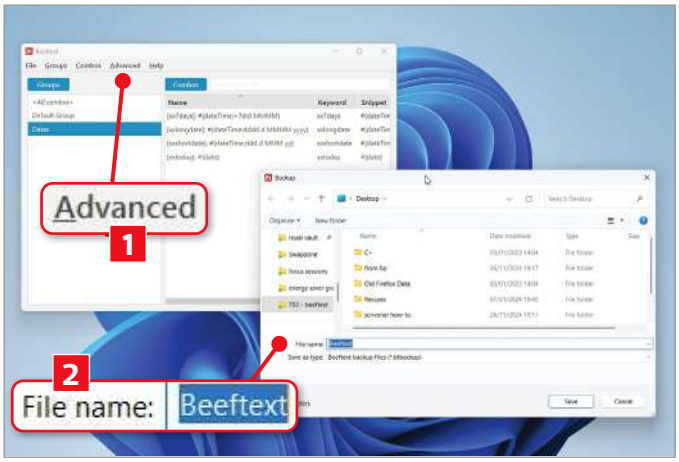
I frequently find myself typing the same passages in my emails, and while using a tool like Beeftext can be a timesaver, there's another big benefit as far as I'm concerned: consistency. When I've thought of a good way to phrase something, I'll probably want to use it again. The easiest way to do that is to turn it into a snippet and associate it with a keyword. That way, I can be sure not only that what's going into my emails is what I want to say, but also that it's free of spelling mistakes.

Nik Rawlinson

How would you use Beeftext?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk



You can also ask Beeftext to perform date-based maths



Organise your snippets by placing them in groups then giving them descriptions

can save yourself the hassle of working out when that would be by again using a variable.

Create a new snippet, then in the Snippet box type #{dateTime:+7d:d MMMM} (1 in our screenshot above), followed by xx7days in the Keyword box 2. Click Save. Now switch to Notepad and type xx7days to test your snippet. As we're writing this on 17 December, when we type Please make sure you have paid your annual membership fee by xx7days, the keyword xx7days is immediately replaced by 24 December without us having had to work out when a week from the date of writing would be.

How does this work? To understand it, you need to split that snippet into two. The 'dateTime' word is just telling Beeftext which variable to use, and +7d tells it to add seven days to the current date.

If we'd instead typed +28d it would have added 28 days, while +3m would have added three months and -5y would have subtracted five years. The colon immediately after this bit of maths separates the maths itself from the format we want to use for the resulting output.

As we discussed earlier, d represents the output date, without any padding, and MMMM stands in for the full name of the output month. We could have missed out the formatting (d MMMM), but in that case the output returned by the snippet would have been the date with full month and full year, immediately followed by the current hour, minute, and second. That's more information than we need.

The more you use variables and maths, the more familiar they will become. Beeftext's documentation is a good starting place for learning more about how they work: www.snipca.com/53280.

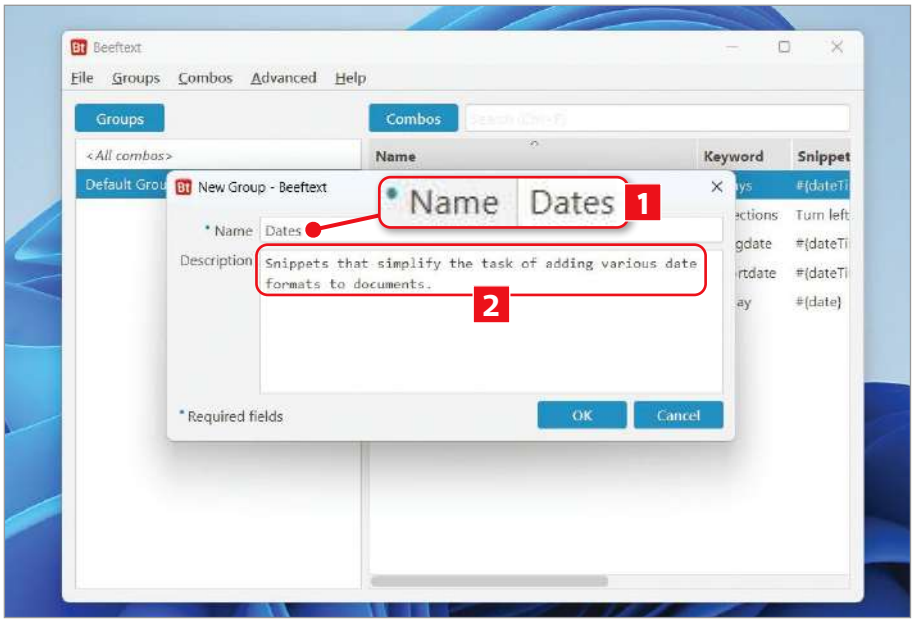
4 Organise and export your snippets

If you end up creating a large selection of snippets and keywords, use Beeftext's groups feature to organise them. Initially, every snippet will be added to the Default Group. To create a second one, perhaps for your date-based snippets, press Ctrl+Shift+N, and give the new group a name, like Dates (1 in our screenshot below) and (optionally) a description 2.

When you've created a group, Beeftext will switch to it, so click back to the Default Group, then click, hold and drag each of your date-based snippets into the group you just created. Although they will disappear from the Default Group, they can still be used in just the same way – by typing their keyword into a document where you want the corresponding snippet to appear.

If you have more than one computer, it also makes sense to set up Beeftext with the same set of snippets and keywords on each one. To save you setting them up again from scratch, you can export them from your first PC by clicking Advanced followed by Back Up. Save the backup file to an external drive so you can transfer it to your second machine. There, click Advanced (1 in our screenshot below) in Beeftext, followed by Restore, and select the file you just exported 2.

Be careful not to leave the exported file lying around if any of your snippets include personal information like payment-card numbers, because the backup file can be opened in a regular text editor to reveal its contents.

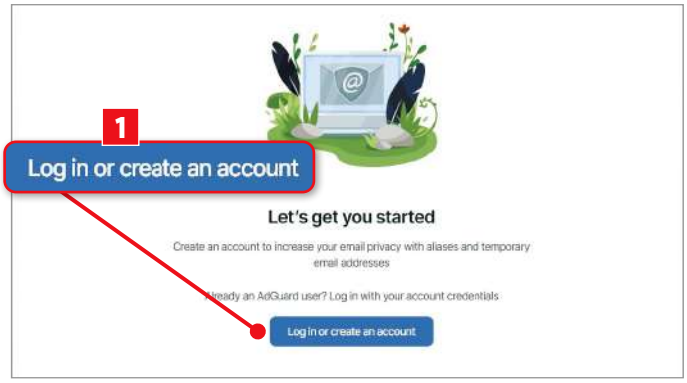


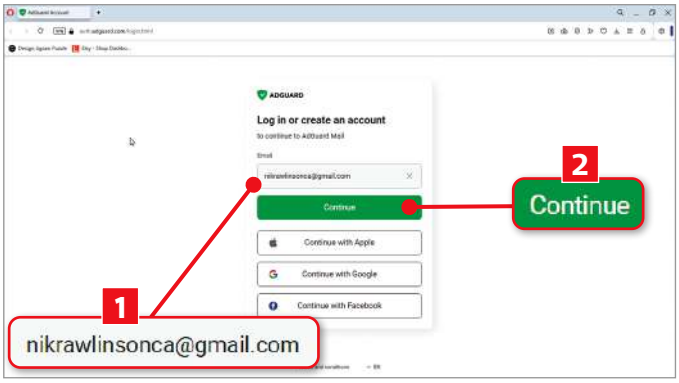
When you've set up your snippets on one machine, you can export them for use on another

Stop spam by creating an AdGuard email alias

What you need: AdGuard Mail
Time required: 30 minutes

When an online store asks for your email address you could end up on a mailing list that's not easy to unsubscribe from and face years of spam. Alternatively, you could use AdGuard, which is best known for blocking online ads and has now launched an email-masking tool. Sign up for AdGuard Mail and you'll get an alias email address that you can provide instead of your main email. Any messages it receives will still be forwarded to your main inbox so you can monitor them. And if AdGuard Mail starts to receive spam, you can simply block the sender, safe in the knowledge that, because they don't have your real details, you'll never hear from them again. Here, we explain how to set up and use it.

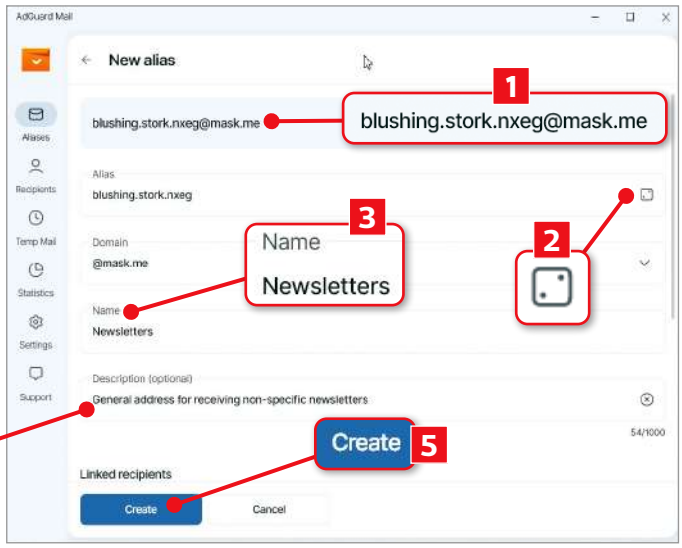

1
Log in or create an account
Let's get you started
Create an account to increase your email privacy with aliases and temporary email addresses
Already an AdGuard user? Log in with your account credentials
Log in or create an account

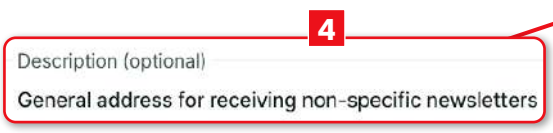


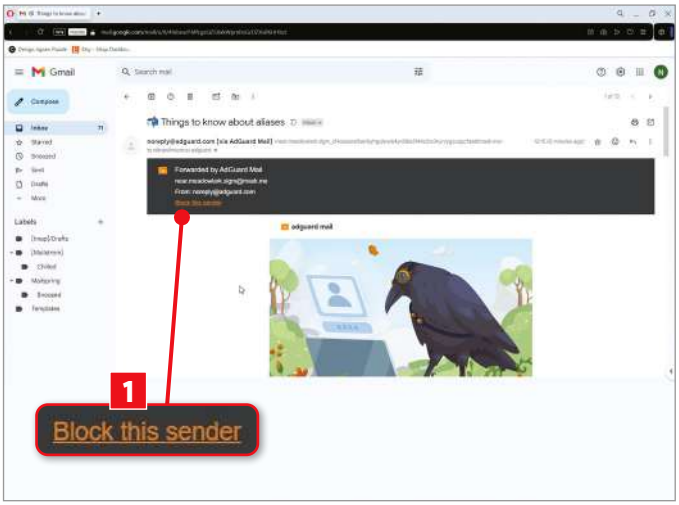
STEP 1 Download AdGuard Mail from the Microsoft Store by clicking the Get button at www.snipca.com/53391. When you launch it for the first time, read through the terms and conditions, click the box next to 'I accept', then click Continue. Click Next on the following five screens (which outline its features), then click 'Log in or create an account' 1 to open the AdGuard login page.

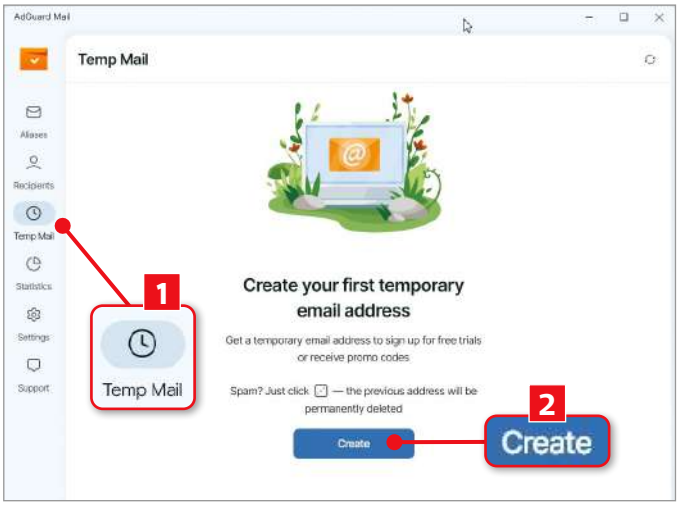
STEP 2 Enter your current main email address 1 (the one you want messages redirected to) and click Continue 2. Type a password of at least eight characters, read the terms and conditions, and tick the box next to 'I agree'. Click Continue and AdGuard will send a code to the email address you specified. Type the code into the AdGuard web page to verify your account, then click Continue followed by 'Return to app'.

STEP 3 Click Create to generate your first alias. This will be shown at the top of the next page 1. If you don't like the address you've been allocated, click the dice button 2 for a new one. Any messages received by the alias will bypass the AdGuard Mail program and be forwarded directly to the email address you specified in Step 2. You can amend the alias's name, which you'll only use for your own reference when you need to differentiate it from any other address you create. We're setting up one for newsletters by typing Newsletters in the Name box 3 and a brief explanation in the Description box 4. Click Create 5.





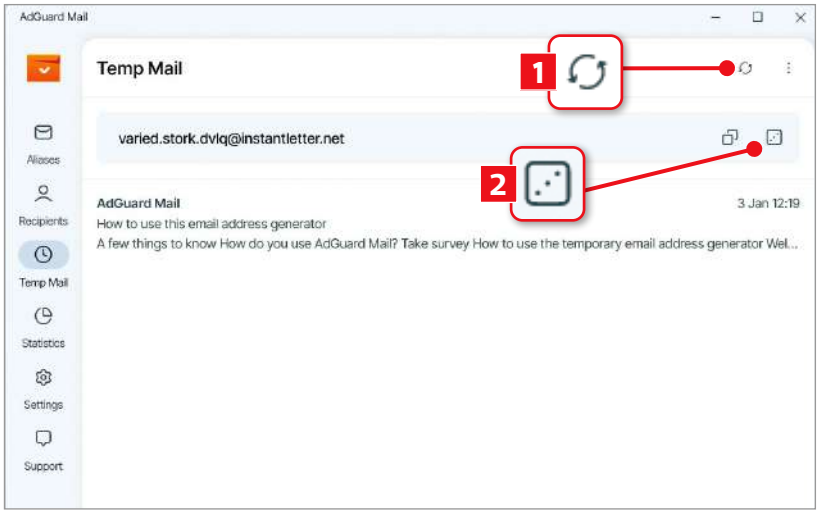


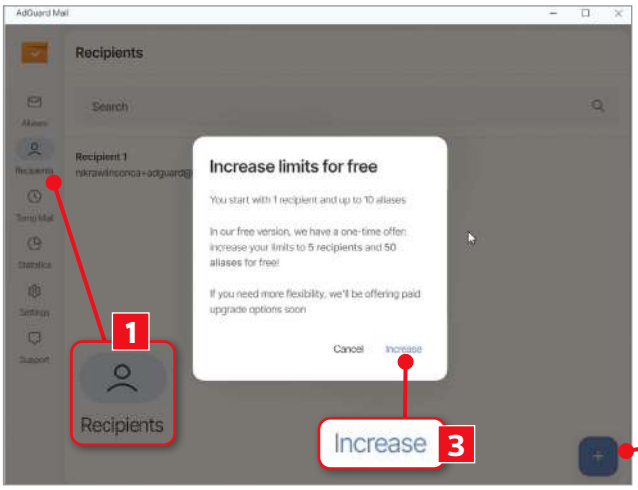

Temp Mail
Create your first temporary email address
Get a temporary email address to sign up for free trials or receive promo codes
Spam? Just click — the previous address will be permanently deleted
Create
1
2

STEP 4 AdGuard will now send a test message to your new alias so you can see what it looks like. Return to your main inbox and check for new mail, then open the message. You'll see there's a banner running across the top of the message containing a 'Block this sender' link 1. If you start receiving spam via your new alias, click this link and no further messages from that sender will be forwarded to your inbox.

STEP 5 There will be occasions when you just want to use an address once – perhaps to secure a discount online – without receiving further emails from that store. In this case, you should use a temporary address rather than an alias. To do this, click Temp Mail 1 in the AdGuard sidebar, then click Create 2. The address will be shown at the top of the following page, where you can copy it to use whenever you need it.

STEP 6 Emails received by your temporary address are only displayed within the AdGuard Mail program and won't be forwarded to your main email address. To force AdGuard Mail to check for new messages, click the refresh button 1. You can use a temporary address on multiple sites but, if it starts to receive spam, you can change it for a new random address by clicking the dice button 2. You can't reply to emails from a temporary address or receive attachments. If you need either of these options, use an alias instead.


Temp Mail
varied.stork.dvlq@instantletter.net
AdGuard Mail
3 Jan 12:19
How to use this email address generator
A few things to know How do you use AdGuard Mail? Take survey How to use the temporary email address generator Wel...
1
2



STEP 7 You can create up to 50 aliases, and redirect messages from those to up to five 'real' email addresses. To have this option, once you've created your first alias and linked your main email address, click Recipients 1 in the sidebar, followed by the plus (+) button at the bottom of the screen 2, then Increase 3 in the window that appears.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

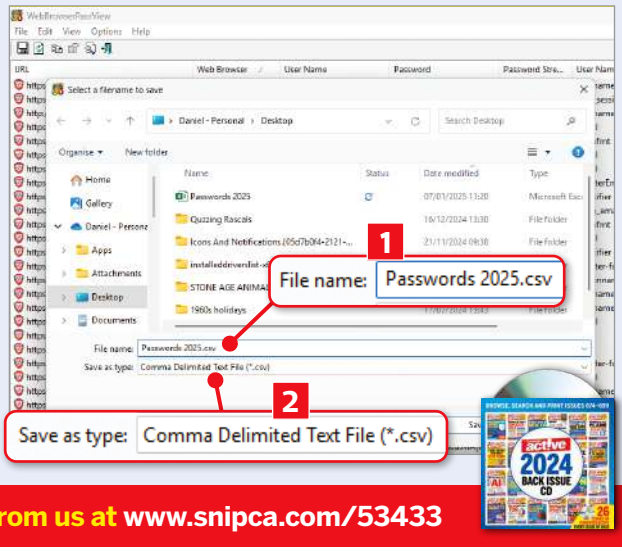
Export passwords as a spreadsheet

I'm grateful to *Computeractive* for recommending NirSoft's WebBrowserPassView (www.snipca.com/53080) in Issue 700 (page 20). For years I've been looking for an easy way to see my passwords across all my browsers – and this is it.

You mention that selecting Mark Odd/Even rows makes the list easier to read, and that's certainly true. But another way to study the list – and is even easier in my opinion – is to export them as a spreadsheet.

To do so, press Ctrl+A to select all the passwords, then click File at the top left followed by Save Selected Items. Now give the file a suitable name (1 in our screenshot) then save it as a Comma Delimited Text File 2, which has the file extension .csv. This will save it as a spreadsheet using your default office tool. Now choose where to save it, then click Save to confirm. And that's it – job done!

Mark Fields



Mark wins a copy of our 2024 Back Issue CD **Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/53433**

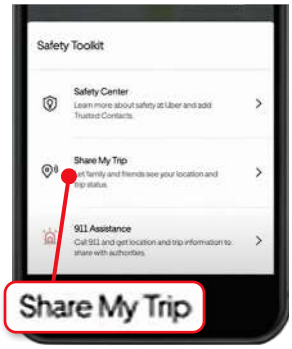
APPS

Share your location when travelling in an Uber car

I often need to keep an eye on my elderly parents when they're not at home, so I made a note of Issue 700's tips on sharing your location (page 62). I sometimes book Uber cars for them because they tend to be cheaper than traditional taxis (though the distinction between the two is starting to blur).

To set my mind at ease, I told them to add me as a 'trusted' contact in Uber's settings. This lets them share their journey with me. They just swipe up from the bottom of the screen on their shared Android phone, then tap 'Share My Trip' (see screenshot below left) followed by my name.

Lynne McClair



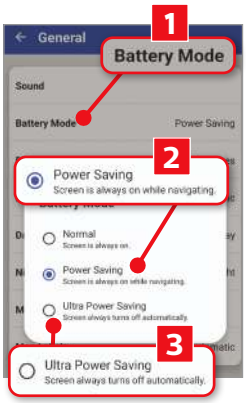
APPS

Turn on Power Saving in Magic Earth

Like Kevin Wiffen ('Tip of the Fortnight', Issue 698), I now use the Magic Earth app (www.magicearth.com) instead of Google Maps. He's right to praise its variety of options for customising maps, but I do worry it's draining too much of my phone's battery. I use a Google Pixel 4, which I bought in 2020, and it's beginning to lose power quicker than before.

This concern has prompted me to turn on Power Saving in Magic Earth. This dims the screen after a period of inactivity to reduce battery drain, but the map remains visible. Tap the top-left cog icon, then General. Now tap Battery Mode (1 in our screenshot above) and select Power Saving 2. There's also an Ultra Power Saving option 3, which goes further by automatically turning off the screen during navigation.

Robert Fenwick



Why I stopped using...

Firefox

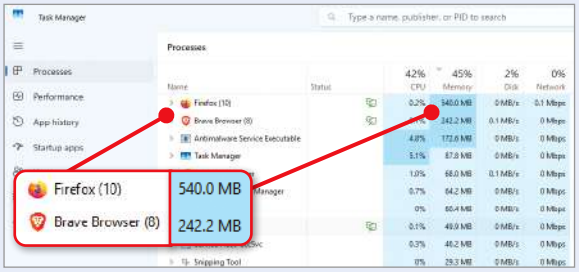
I was quite happy using Firefox, but a few months ago it started to increase the number of sponsors appearing as suggestions in its address bar.

At first only a few paid-for sponsors appeared following a search, most of them potentially relevant. But now I need to look much further down to find what I'm looking for. Also, it began to use far too much memory on my computer when I had several pages open.

And what I use instead...

I switched to the **Brave** browser (https://brave.com), which doesn't show suggested results in its address bar – and therefore can't show sponsored suggestions. It also uses far less memory than Firefox (see screenshot) because it blocks ads and trackers by default and has fewer built-in features.

Martin Wilkins



Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Handy hints and tips from your fellow readers

Email us your tips: letters@computeractive.co.uk

HARDWARE

Keep power and data cables apart

I found Issue 699's Cover Feature on ditching cables very interesting, and it encouraged me to become even more wireless over the next 12 months. But if you *are* forced to use cables – especially over several metres – one thing to remember is to keep power cables separate from those delivering data and signals. If they're placed too close, you can suffer from electromagnetic interference. This can cause slower speeds and dropped connections. I've always kept them at least 12 inches apart. If they must cross, do so at a 90-degree angle to reduce interference.

Eric Tanner

GENEALOGY

Use 'Relationship calculator' to work how ancestors are related

I've been using My Family Tree (www.snipca.com/52962) for many years, so I agree with your assessment that it's the best free option for amateur genealogists (Issue 699, page 20). You should recommend it more often in your Grow Your Family Tree column.

One tool users should definitely use is the Relationship calculator. This works out the relationship between your ancestors, which is tricky to do yourself over many generations and across several families. Click 'Tools' at the top then select 'Relationship calculator' (1 in our screenshot below). Now type two ancestors' names into the box 2 and their relationship will be shown below 3.

On the right you'll see the generational 'steps' taking you from one ancestor to the other 4. Click 'Swap' 5 to switch the relationship between the people you selected and Reset 6 to start from scratch.

Karen O'Connor

Reader recommends...

Amazon Echo Spot smart speaker

£80 from www.snipca.com/51629

Every Christmas my daughter likes to give me devices that she thinks I'll find useful but which I'd never get around to buying myself. My present this year was Amazon's Echo Spot smart speaker, which I was told doubles up as an alarm clock.

It certainly looks stylish on my bedside table, and it's easy to set the alarm every evening and tap the top to hit snooze every morning. It plays music to send me to sleep, and automatically dims to a dull red after a while so its screen doesn't wake me during the night.

It's easy to set 'routines' so instead of an alarm you can wake up to a radio station. The top half of the screen shows the time and weather, and it responds quickly to my voice to turn the radio on/off.

If I have one criticism it's that the snooze sensor is so sensitive that it can be activated simply by shutting a drawer. It's a minor design flaw on what is otherwise a brilliant device.

Len Anderson

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?
Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

BROWSERS

Update Brave to keep blocking ads on YouTube

Until a few years ago I never saw the point in blocking adverts on YouTube. They didn't appear that often and it was easy to skip them. That's all changed and many videos are now unwatchable due to the countless adverts.

My defence against this onslaught is Brave's ad-blocking tool. It normally works well, but suddenly stopped a few days before Christmas. The solution, Brave said, was to update to a newer version. This might also work in future when adverts start sneaking through.

To do this, type brave://components into Brave's address bar (1 in our screenshot below right) then scroll down until you see 'Brave Ad Block Updater'. Click the 'Check for update' button 2 so it updates to version 1.0.9653 or later. When done, the 'Status' will change to 'Updated' 3.

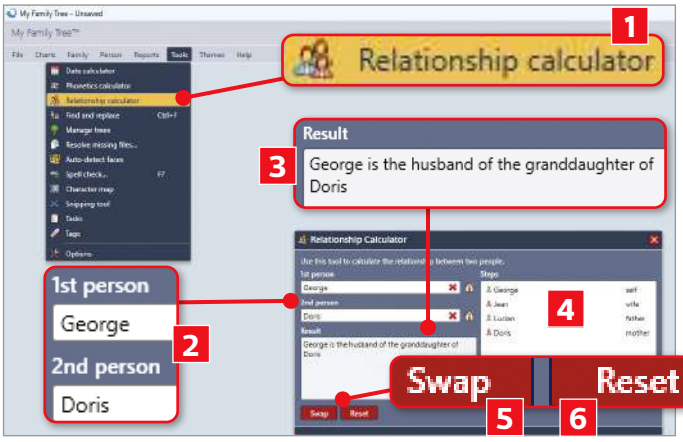
Paul Browning

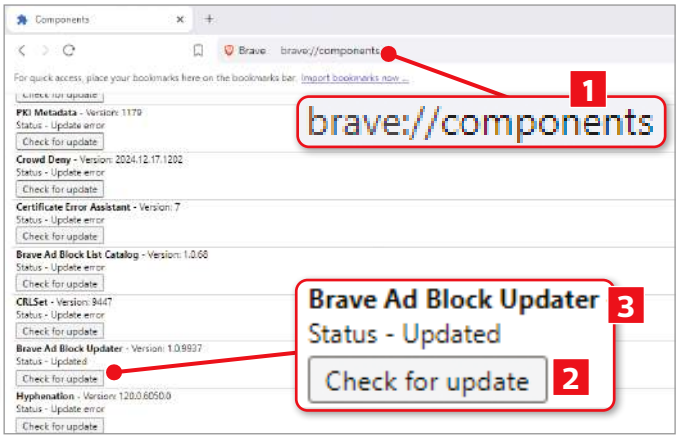
Wi-Fi

Take a photo of password before replacing router

In Issue 700's Letters Bob Ballard complained that his devices get BT and EE mixed up. The answer is simple and EE should have realised the cause. When using the EE app to automatically connect his existing devices to the new router, the name is changed to that of the old one. This means that the password also changes to that of the old one. I foresaw this problem, so before I returned my router I took a photo of the password as a record, in case I needed to manually install something in the future.

Stuart Turnbull





Browser Tips

FIREFOX

Chat with Mozilla's new AI assistant

Mozilla has followed the example of Microsoft, Brave and Opera (and Google in the US) by introducing an AI assistant for its browser. It's called Orbit (www.snipca.com/53389) and is currently in beta, so Mozilla has taken the sensible precaution of making the chatbot optional, rather than foisting it on Firefox users prematurely.

You can try Orbit now by installing its extension from the Firefox Add-ons Store (www.snipca.com/53390). It requires permission to access your browsing data and tabs, so it can "generate summaries and provide real-time answers". This is standard for an AI assistant, but you can stop Orbit collecting additional data for "error monitoring and performance tracking" by clicking 'Agree to Essential Data Collection only'.

Orbit appears in the top-right corner of the browser window as a swirling animated circle, which you can drag to move wherever you want. Hover your cursor over this circle to access Orbit's Summarize option (1 in our screenshot below), which summarises the current web page, and to ask it questions about the content.

Click the Settings cog to customise the style of Orbit's responses – bullet points, short sentences or full paragraphs – and to let it summarise emails and YouTube videos too. Click the Snooze Orbit option to hide the AI assistant until you need it.

It's still early days for Orbit, and we found its summaries and answers rather slow and basic compared with those from Microsoft's Copilot, Brave's Leo and Opera's Aria. However, it worked better when we used its suggested prompts 2.

See our Cover Feature on page 50 for more about AI assistants.

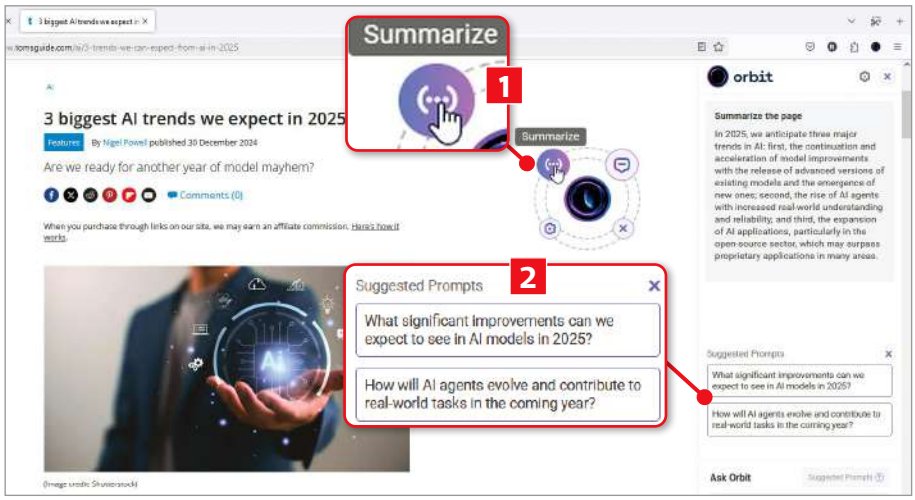
CHROME

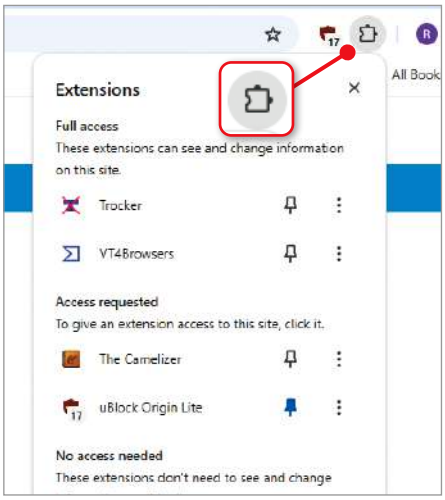
Control which websites extensions can access

The Extensions menu in Chrome, which you open by clicking the jigsaw-piece icon on the browser's toolbar (see screenshot below), is currently rather unwieldy and confusing. It tells you which extensions have full access to a website, which have requested access and which have no access, but doesn't offer a simple way to disable all or individual extensions on specific sites.

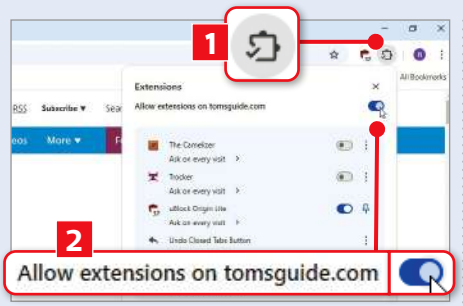
To remedy this problem, Google is testing a new and improved Extensions menu, which makes it much easier to control which Chrome extensions can access which websites. This is particularly useful when a site such as YouTube demands you disable your ad blocker if you want to view its content.

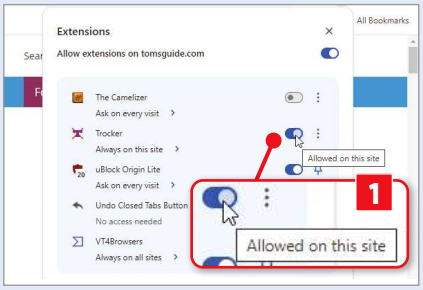
The redesigned menu is currently a Chrome experiment, but should be


Summarize
1
3 biggest AI trends we expect in 2025
Summarize
orbit
Summarize the page
2
Suggested Prompts
What significant improvements can we expect to see in AI models in 2025?
How will AI agents evolve and contribute to real-world tasks in the coming year?
Ask Orbit



WORKSHOP Activate Chrome's new Extensions menu





1 Type chrome://flags into Chrome's address bar and press Enter to load the Experiments page. Find the entry Extensions Menu Access Control 1, select Enabled in its dropdown menu 2 and click the Relaunch button.

2 When the browser reopens, visit a website and click the Extensions menu button 1. You'll see a new option to 'Allow extensions on [domain of current site]' 2 – turn this on to permit extensions to run, or leave it off to keep them disabled.

3 Click the slider next to each extension to specify whether it's 'Allowed on this site' 1 or 'Not allowed'. Chrome will remember your extension preferences the next time you visit the current website, or you can change them at any time.

BEST EXTENSION FOR... Finding discount codes

Syrup

Chromium www.snipca.com/53429
Firefox www.snipca.com/53430

PayPal's popular discount-finding tool Honey has been accused of deceptive practices, which have reportedly lost it around three million users (www.snipca.com/53427). We've previously recommended Pouch as the best alternative, but this was recently bought by Hotukdeals (www.snipca.com/53428), which – like Honey, but more transparently – also makes money from affiliate commissions. If that puts you off, try the new open-source extension Syrup. This similarly provides voucher codes for online stores, but prioritises "transparency, user privacy and ethical design over profit-driven motives". Click its toolbar button to view discounts for the current site, then click Copy (see screenshot below left) to apply codes at checkout. Not all of them work, but neither do Honey's, and Syrup's developer has promised to keep expanding and updating its database.

If you don't like that, try...

DealFinder by VoucherCodes

Chromium
www.snipca.com/53431

This extension finds you discount codes for thousands of brands and stores and applies them automatically.

officially introduced in the browser within the next few months. See our Workshop on the opposite page if you'd like to try it now.

CHROMIUM

Identify AI-generated images, text and videos

The increasing sophistication of AI tools is making it harder to tell whether text, photos and videos were created by humans or generated using artificial intelligence. Dozens of browser extensions claim to detect AI-produced content, but most either don't work properly or require you to sign up for an account and even pay to see their results.

One notable exception is Hive AI Detector (www.snipca.com/53423), which is free to use, with no account requirements, and is impressively fast and accurate. You must agree to its terms and conditions after installing the extension, but it doesn't collect or share your data.

There are several ways to use Hive. The simplest is to right-click an image or a highlighted section of text on a web page and select Hive AI Detector (1 in our screenshot below left). The extension will then scan the content and present its findings in a pop-up. As well as telling you – as a percentage – how likely it is that the image or text has been AI-generated 2, it will try to identify which tool created it, such as Dall-E, Stable Diffusion or Adobe Firefly.

Alternatively, you can click the Hive AI Detector button in the bottom-right corner of the browser window 3. This lets you copy and paste an image or text from a web page, or an audio or video clip of less than 30 seconds, then click Check Origin to determine if it was produced using AI. You can also upload and check files from your computer.

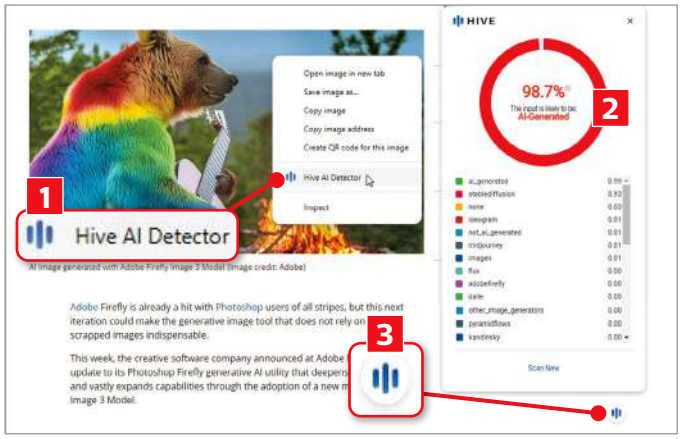
EDGE

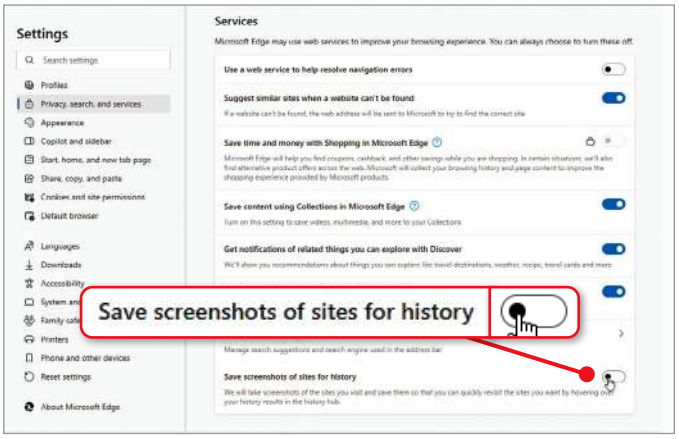
Stop saving screenshots of every site you visit

Microsoft's new Recall feature for Copilot+ PCs, which captures screenshots of your activities so you can quickly find content you've previously viewed, has proved highly controversial. Strangely, few people have pointed out that Edge added a similar (if less intrusive) option back in 2023, which saves screenshots of every web page you visit in the browser's History.

The idea is that you can hover your cursor over an entry in History to see a thumbnail image of the page. This lets you preview the content before you revisit the site. However, from a privacy point of view, it also means Edge is keeping a visual record of your browsing activities, which anyone who uses your computer can see too.

Thankfully, the feature is disabled by default, but it's worth double-checking that a browser update or other user hasn't switched it on. Click the three-dot menu in Edge's top-right corner and choose Settings then 'Privacy, search and services'. Scroll down to the Services section and ensure the option 'Save screenshots of sites for history' (see screenshot below) is switched off.





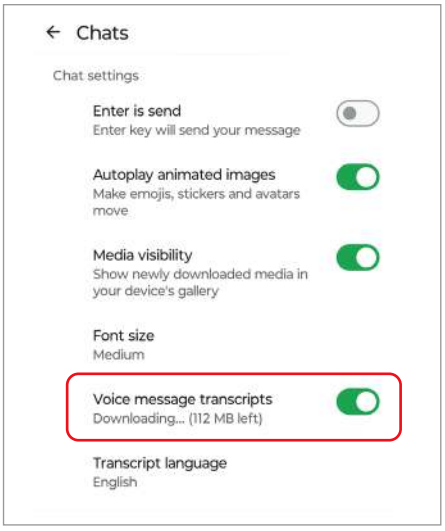
Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID & iOS

Read transcripts of WhatsApp voice messages

Sending someone a voice message in WhatsApp can save you the hassle of typing one and make your communication feel more personal – such as for a birthday greeting. But listening to voice messages isn't always easy, especially when you're in a noisy environment or a quiet but not private one. They're also difficult to find later, because you can't search their content like you can with text messages.

To address these problems, WhatsApp has updated its app with a useful 'Voice message transcripts' feature. This converts audio clips into text, so you can read them when it's not possible to listen, and search for specific voice messages later.



To activate this new option, tap the three-dot menu in the top-right corner of the app and choose Settings, then Chats. Switch on 'Voice message transcripts' under 'Chat settings' (see screenshot below left), then tap 'Choose language' and select English (Spanish, Russian and Portuguese are also supported). Press 'Set up now' to download the language pack.

To view a transcription, long-press the voice message in a WhatsApp chat and choose Transcribe. The transcribing is performed entirely on your phone, so nobody else – including WhatsApp – can read the message content.

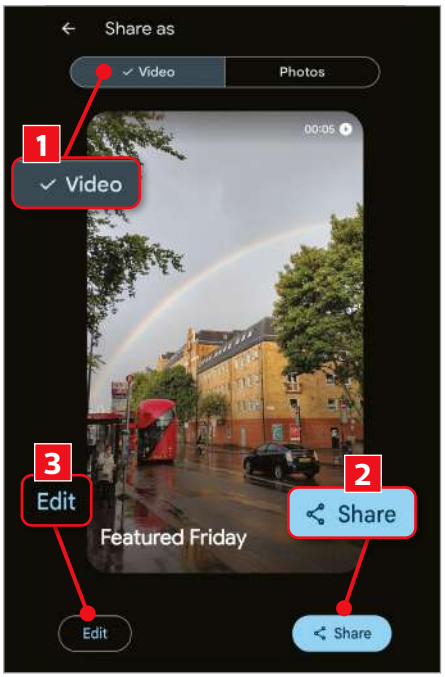
WhatsApp says voice-message transcripts may not always be completely accurate and some words may not be recognised due to background noise (see www.snipca.com/53399).

ANDROID & iOS

Share your Google Photos memories

Google has updated its Photos app with the useful ability to share your 'memories' as videos. Previously, you could only share memories with other Google Photos users, who would then view a slideshow of images in their own installation of the app.

The update converts the slideshow into an MP4 video, which can be shared to other apps, including email, messaging and social-media services. The video can also be downloaded to your phone or tablet to view offline; and sent to other devices via Bluetooth.



To use the new feature, select a memory from the strip across the top of the Google Photos app, then press the Share button and choose Video (1 in our screenshot above) under 'Share as'. Tap the Share button 2 and either select one of the suggested apps or tap More to see further options. This will then convert the memory into an MP4 file, so you can send the video to your desired app, device or person.

BEST NEW APPS What you should install this fortnight

uRead

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/53409

This mobile library for your ebooks and audiobooks keeps all your reading and listening material organised in one place.

Set uRead to scan specific folders for compatible files, then use it to search the content of books, add annotations and rate your favourite titles. Some features are limited to the Premium version, which costs £6.99.

Google News

Free

Android www.snipca.com/53407

iOS www.snipca.com/53408

The Google News app has been redesigned to simplify navigation. The old 'For you' and Headlines tabs have been merged into a

single Home tab, where you can read all the latest stories. To filter the content, tap a category in the new toolbar across the top – options include Local, Entertainment, Technology, Sports and Health.

AdGuard Mail & Temp Mail

Free

Android www.snipca.com/53405

iOS www.snipca.com/53406

The mobile version of AdGuard's new Mail service (see our Workshop on page 38) generates temporary email addresses

and aliases on your phone or tablet. This allows you to sign up for apps without disclosing your real details and opening your inbox to spam. Like the desktop version, it requires a free AdGuard account.

*Contains in-app purchases

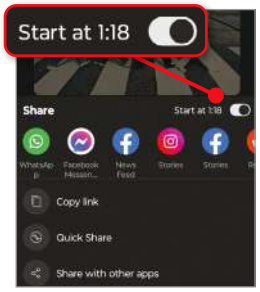
Tap 'Edit' 3 before sharing the video to remove specific images from the memory and change its title. If Google has generated a musical soundtrack for the memory, you can decide whether to include that in the video using the 'Share with music' option (this isn't available for all memories).

ANDROID & iOS

Share specific moments in YouTube songs and videos

YouTube Music has added a handy timestamp option that lets you share songs and podcasts from specific points. This means the recipient of the audio can jump straight to the important moment, without you needing to explain where to skip to – or forcing them to sit through the whole recording.

Start playing the track or episode and, when you reach the desired point, pause playback and tap the Share button. In the top-right corner of the Share panel, you'll see a new 'Start at [timestamp]' option (see screenshot left). Switch this on to share that moment using the app or sharing method of your choice. When the other person taps your shared link, they'll be taken straight to the relevant part.



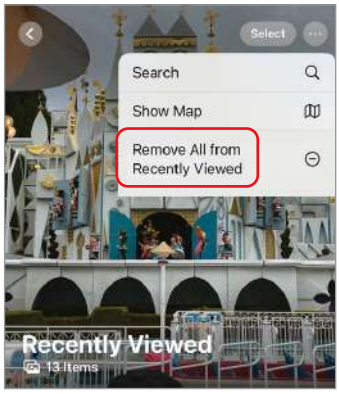
Timestamp sharing is now also available in the main YouTube app, which quietly introduced the feature last year. When you want to share a specific moment in a video, tap Share and switch on 'Start at [timestamp]'.

iOS

Try the new features in Apple Photos

As we mentioned in Issue 701 (page 45), the new Apple Intelligence tools introduced in iOS 18.2 are only available on the iPhone 15 Pro or later and iPads with an A17 Pro or M1 processor. However, if you have an older device you can still enjoy improvements to the Photos app, which are available to everyone who has installed the iOS 18.2 update.

These include an easier way to clear all pictures from your Recently Viewed and Recently Shared folders, both to prevent them from becoming cluttered, and as a privacy precaution. Open either of these folders in the Utilities section of the Photos app, and tap the three-dot More icon in their top-right corner. Select 'Remove All from Recently Viewed [or Recently Shared]' (see screenshot right) to empty the folder – the actual photos won't be affected.



You can also now sort your Photos albums alphabetically, rather than have them presented in the order they were created. Open the Albums section, tap the More icon in the top-right corner and choose Sort By Name.

Another welcome new option stops videos in your Photos library from automatically looping, so they don't play endlessly (and annoyingly). Open the Settings app on your iPhone or iPad, choose Apps followed by Photos and switch off Loop Videos.

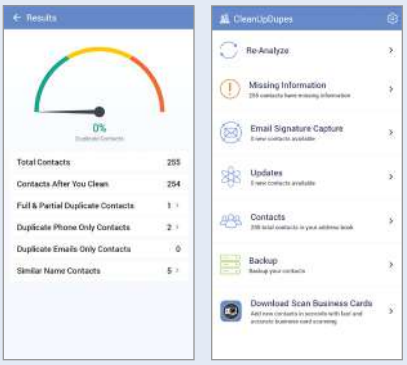
BEST APPS FOR... Deleting duplicates

Remo Duplicate Photos Remover

Free
Android www.snipca.com/53411
iOS www.snipca.com/53410
This app thoroughly scans your phone or tablet for exact duplicates or similar versions of photos, and tells you how much space they're occupying. Tap an image to view its location and last-modified date, then delete the unnecessary copy from your device. You can adjust Remo's 'matching level' to view more or fewer results.
Best For Deleting duplicate and similar photos

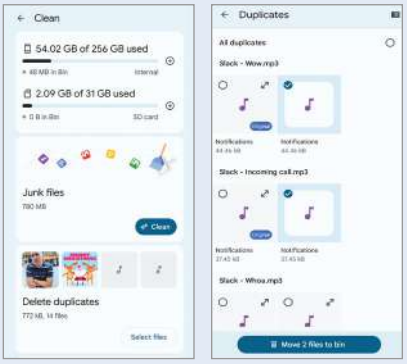
Cleanup Duplicate Contacts

Free
Android www.snipca.com/53414
iOS www.snipca.com/53413
Android and iOS both have options for identifying duplicate contacts, but they're pretty basic. Cleanup Duplicate Contacts goes deeper to find redundant entries, without requiring dubious permissions. You can review results before you delete or merge them, and back up your contacts to restore them if something goes wrong.
Best For Deleting/merging duplicate contacts



Files by Google

Free
Android www.snipca.com/53412
Google's brilliant file manager includes a duplicate remover among its many useful tools. Choose 'Clean' in the top-left menu and tap 'Select files' in the 'Delete duplicates' section. You can then either delete all duplicate photos, videos, documents, audio files and other items in one go, or browse the results and remove copies individually.
Best For Deleting duplicates from Android

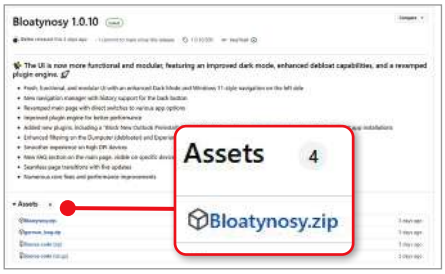


WINDOWS 10 & 11

Block new Outlook app from being installed

Microsoft is automatically installing the new Outlook app on Windows 10 computers. It's part of the optional update that was released on 28 January, and will be included in the compulsory 'Patch Tuesday' security update on 11 February.

It claims the new-look Outlook is easier to use because it replaces all the confusing options in Windows, including the Mail and Calendar apps, with one single tool. But many users think it looks like an online tool rather than a downloadable program, and complain it's too slow and lacks the features they liked in the previous 'Classic' version.



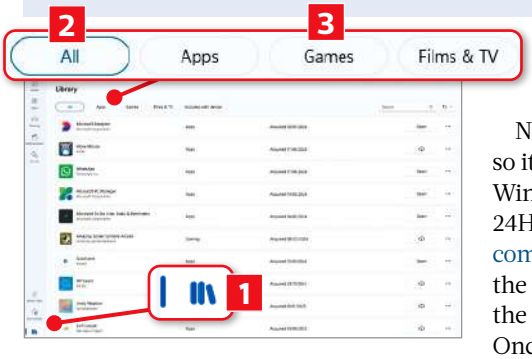
Thankfully, the developers of the junk-removal tool Bloatynosy have updated it to block Outlook from being installed. The program is still a bit erratic, and doesn't always work as effectively as claimed (see page 74), but it's worth trying as a way to keep the new Outlook off your system. To install the latest version (1.0.10) visit www.snipca.com/53483 then click the 'Bloatynosy.zip' file under the Assets heading (see screenshot above).

It says this works only for Windows 11, but it's worth trying for Windows 10 also. If it doesn't work, try reverting to the previous Outlook app following our instructions in Issue 686 (page 62) – read the feature on our new 2024 Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/53433.

WINDOWS 10 & 11

See everything you've installed from Microsoft Store

Microsoft has updated the Library in its Store so it shows everything you've bought – not just what you've already installed. This shows at a glance your entire collection, and makes it easier to download apps you've yet to install on your current PC. To see this list, open the Store on your computer then click the Library icon (1 in our screenshot above) at the bottom left. You'll notice the 'All' option selected at the top 2, with more specific options to the right 3.



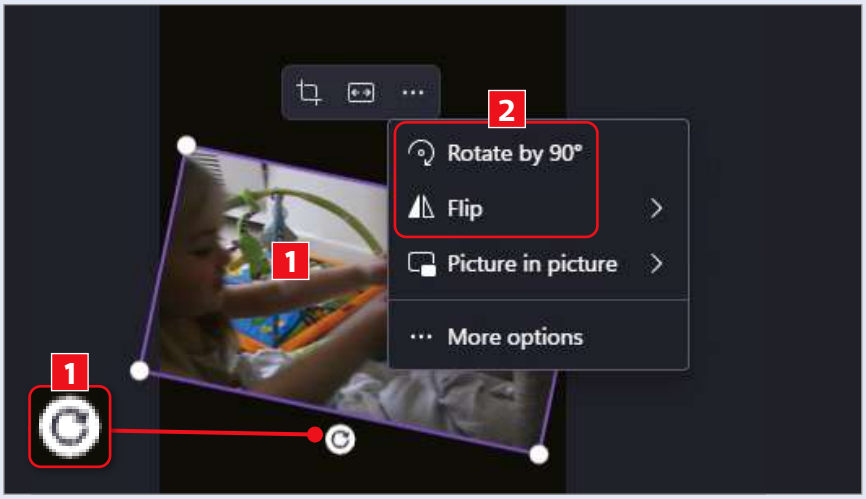
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Rotate images and videos in Clipchamp

You can easily use your mouse to rotate images and videos in Microsoft's default video tool Clipchamp. Launch the program then click the 'Import media' dropdown menu. Choose a file from one of the options, then hover your cursor over the thumbnail image. Click the plus (+) sign that appears at the bottom right to add it to your timeline on the right.

Next, click the circle below the video/image (1 in our screenshot), then move your mouse to rotate. This option is called 'freehand rotate'. For more fixed options, such as rotating by 90 degrees and flipping horizontally and vertically 2, click the three dots.

Clipchamp is built into Windows 11, but you'll probably have to install it on Windows 10 – do so from www.clipchamp.com.



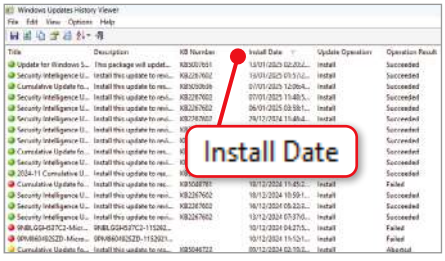
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Install new version of WinUpdatesView

While adding several excellent features, the 24H2 update for Windows 11 has also caused many problems (see pages 62-63). One of the third-party programs struggling with it is NirSoft's WinUpdatesView, which shows a comprehensive history of your Windows updates.

NirSoft recently updated the program so it doesn't crash while reading the Windows Updates database created by 24H2. To download it visit www.snipca.com/53469 then scroll down and click the 32bit or 64bit option, depending on the processor type your computer has. Once downloaded, launch the software then click the Install Date heading (see screenshot below) to see the updates listed by date.

To check you're running the latest version, click Help on the top toolbar, then About and in the box that appears look for 'v1.20' or later.



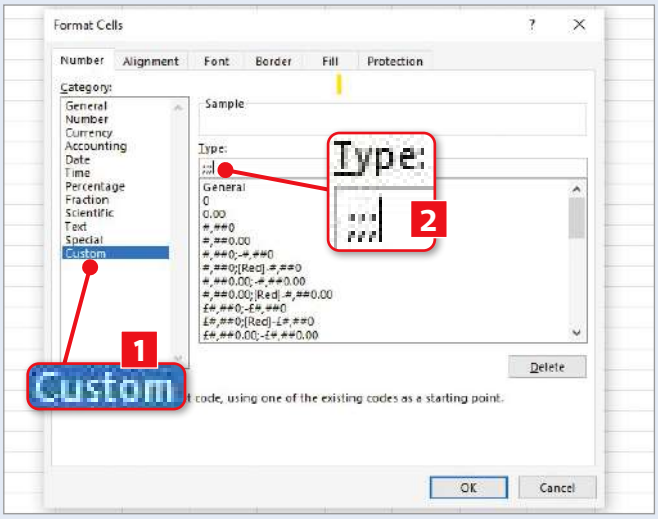
LIBREOFFICE CALC & MICROSOFT EXCEL

Hide cells when printing spreadsheets

When printing your spreadsheets you can hide the data in particular cells, which is useful if they contain sensitive information such as financial or personal details. To do this, select the cells then click Home at the top followed by the small 'Number Format' diagonal arrow at the bottom right of the Number section.

Now click Custom in the Category box on the left (1 in our screenshot) and type three semi-colons (;;;) in the Type field on the right 2. Click OK to confirm. This will make the data disappear on screen, and it won't appear when you print. To see what the cell contains, just click it and look in the Formula bar at the top.

To do this in LibreOffice Calc, select the cell then right-click it and choose Format Cells. Now click the Numbers tab then select 'User-defined' in the Category list. Type ;;; in the Format Code box at the bottom then click OK.

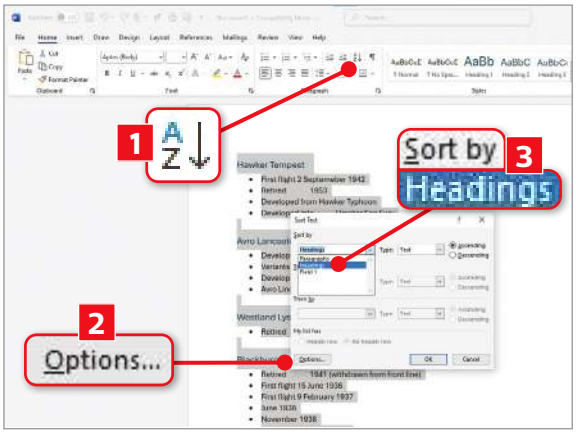


ONLYOFFICE

Add text from files saved on your PC

OnlyOffice 8.2, released last October, adds the option to import text from a file on your computer, saving you the hassle of opening the document then cutting and pasting the text. The option appears only in the Document and PDF Form tools (not Presentation or Spreadsheet), so open either then click Insert at the top, followed by 'Text from File' (1 in our screenshot below right). Now click 'Text from the local file' 2 then find and click the relevant file on your computer. The text will appear in your document.

There's also a 'Text from the URL file' option 3 that lets you insert text from a file you've saved online. Click it to see a box where you can type the file's URL.



MICROSOFT WORD

Alphabetise headings but not bullet points

The Sort tool in Word lets you list headings alphabetically without changing the order of the bullet-point lists below them. In our example, we want to alphabetise our headings – UK planes from World War 2 – but keep the bullet points as they are.

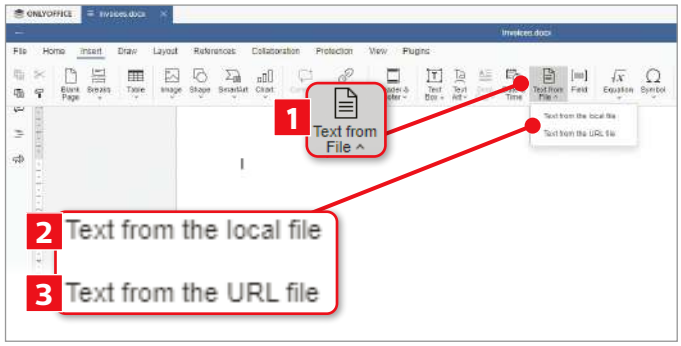
First, press Ctrl+A to select all the text then click the Home tab. Next, click the A-Z 'Sort' icon (1 in our screenshot left) to open the Sort Text box, then the Options button 2. Select Other under 'Separate fields at' then OK. Finally, select Headings in the 'Sort by' dropdown menu 3 then click OK.

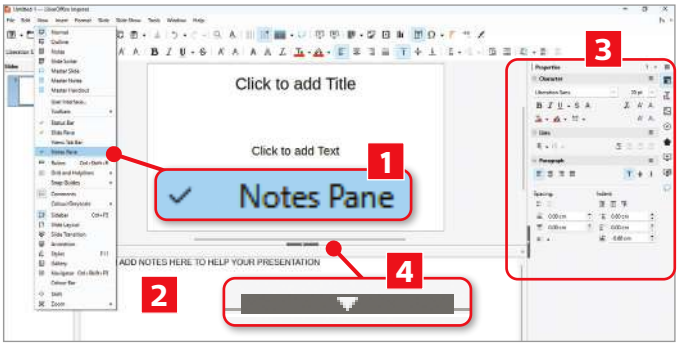
LIBREOFFICE IMPRESS

Add notes pane to presentation slides

The most recent version of LibreOffice (24.8), released last August, added a Notes panel to the presentation tool Impress. This appears below your slides, letting you add notes to help with presentations.

To turn this on, click View at the top then select Notes Pane (1 in our screenshot below). You'll see the Notes pane where you can type 2, with formatting tools on the right 3. Click the arrow to close the pane 4, then click it again to open it whenever you need to make more notes.



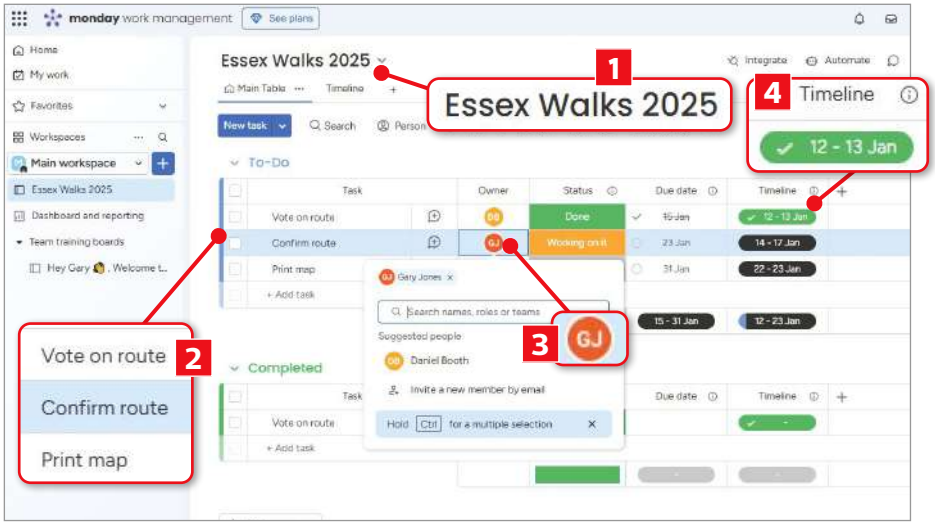


In The Club

Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Create a timeline for volunteer tasks

Monday.com is a website that helps you organise tasks, track progress and meet deadlines. While it has many paid-for features aimed at businesses, there are enough free tools for clubs to help them plan events. It can, for example, turn a list of tasks into a timeline that's easy to follow. Once you invite members, they can update their progress, letting you keep an eye on the overall project.



The chosen volunteer can set a task status, due date and a timeline of when the task will be completed

Invite members and type your tasks

First, create a free account at www.snipca.com/53467, then add your details. Pay attention to the 'Account name' field because the name you choose will be in your account's URL.

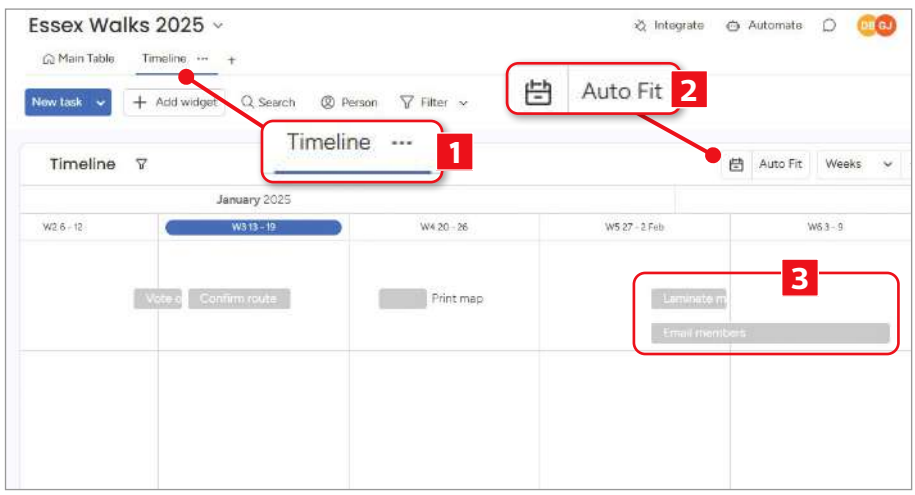
Monday.com will now ask you how you'll use your account. We'd advise choosing Personal, then Other until you reach the question asking 'Who else is on your team?'. Type the email address of anyone you work closely with, then make them an Admin (so they can invite and manage new users) or just a Member (who can add and edit content). Click the blue 'Invite your team' button – they'll need to accept this in the email that's sent to them. Now give your timeline a name in the 'My first project' box.

It then asks which columns you'd like on your board. To start with, choose Timeline, then Next. You can then choose which email and calendar tools you want to use, though this isn't essential. Click Next and you'll be asked which tasks you want to see. By default, you'll see a task overview plus task status and who 'owns' them. You can add the task due date and whether they're overdue (we added both). On the right you'll see how these tasks will appear.

Click 'Next' then click Timeline under 'Add a view layout' followed by Next. Now name the specific tasks in your timeline – you can choose three – then click 'Get started'. You'll now see your timeline with the project name you chose (1 in our screenshot above), and the tasks you typed 2.

Now choose a task you want to give to a volunteer, then click its people icon in the Owner column. Search for a member, then click their name and their initials will replace the icon 3, indicating they've been given this task. If the person you want hasn't been added to your account, do this by clicking the Invite button top right.

The person you choose (or you as the account's creator) can now choose a task status, due date and a timeline of when the task is likely to be done 4. Click '+Add task' if you need to create more. You can also add completed tasks below.



Click 'Timeline' to see the tasks presented as bars on a calendar

Show tasks on a calendar

Now click Timeline (1 in our screenshot left) to see the tasks shown on a calendar, then Auto Fit 2 so it fits neatly inside the panel. You'll see the tasks represented as bars stretching across the dates they're being worked on 3.

There are plenty of other useful options to explore, including filtering the tasks by person and searching tasks by keyword – find both of these above the calendar. You can also combine these to find certain tasks allocated to different people.

Next issue: Send event invites and manage RSVPs

What's All the Fuss About...

HDMI 2.2

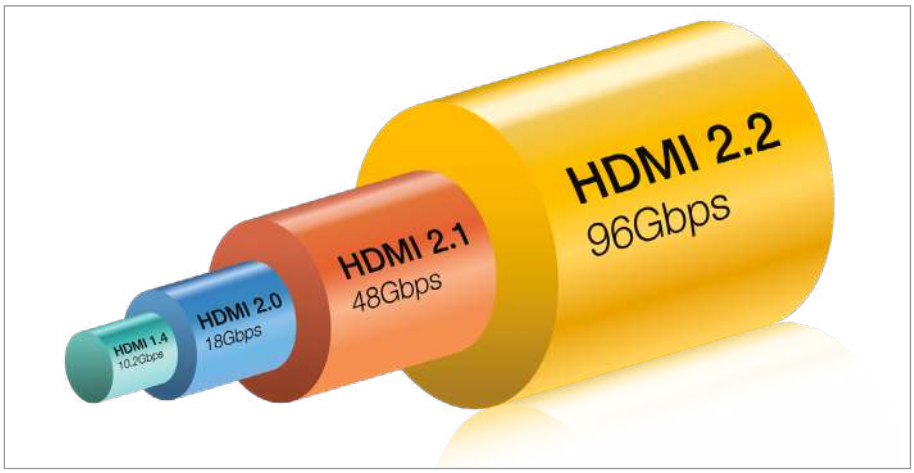
Faster refresh rates at higher resolutions are coming – eventually

What is HDMI 2.2?

It's the latest version of the cable standard that connects our TVs, monitors, gaming consoles and streaming devices. Announced on 6 January at the CES show in Las Vegas, it doubles the bandwidth of HDMI 2.1 from 48Gbps to 96Gbps. This means it supports higher resolutions and refresh rates, such as 4K at 480Hz, 8K at 240Hz, and even 10K at 120Hz.

Is that quite a big jump then?

Yes, as represented by the illustration right, provided by the HDMI Licensing Administrator. No, it's not the world's most impractically designed earplug, but a representation of how HDMI has improved since version 1.4 (released in 2009), which had a bandwidth of 10.2Gbps.



Credit: HDMI Licensing Administrator

But what's that got to do with resolutions and refresh rates?

First, let's explain how they work. Resolution refers to how many pixels make up the image on your screen. The higher the resolution, the more detailed and sharper the image appears. For example, 4K has about 8 million pixels (3840x2160), while 8K has 33 million (7680x4320). Refresh rate refers to how many times per second the screen refreshes the image. A higher refresh rate means smoother motion on screen. For example, 60Hz means the screen refreshes 60 times per second, while 240Hz refreshes 240 times.

Both HDMI 2.1 and 2.2 have a refresh rate of 480Hz when showing Full HD video (1920x1080 pixels). The key difference comes with 4K, which HDMI 2.2 can also handle at 480Hz – four times what HDMI 2.1 was capable of. It'll make a huge difference in fast-paced content such as when playing video games or watching sport.

But what if I don't play games or watch 4K TV?

No matter – you'll still benefit from HDMI 2.2. It uses Latency Indication Protocol (LIP) technology for improving how audio and video are synchronised, which you'll particularly notice if you use soundbars. This means dialogue and sound effects will sync more closely with what's happening on screen. It also has Next-Gen HDMI Fixed Rate Link Technology, which improves the efficiency of audio and video signals. This will keep content smooth as your bandwidth increases.

Will I need to buy new cables for HDMI 2.2?

Yes, you'll need Ultra96 cables, which are designed to handle the increased data flow without compromising quality. The HDMI Licensing Administrator will add QR codes to official cables that you can scan to check they're genuine (pictured below left).

Your old cables will still work with HDMI 2.2, but you won't get any of the new features. Also, both your source device (for example, your console or streaming box) and your display (such as your TV or monitor) will need to support HDMI 2.2.

Are there any devices that support HDMI 2.2 already?

No. It's only just been confirmed, and compatible devices aren't expected until the second half of the year. But it could take a lot longer to become mainstream. After all, HDMI 2.1 was announced in 2017, but it took until 2020 to widely appear on devices.

So I don't need to buy anything just yet?

No, but you'll be preparing for the future when you do because HDMI 2.2 works with 8K TVs and monitors. These are expensive at the moment (the best are over £3,000) and there's hardly any 8K content to watch in any case, but it should become mainstream by the end of the decade. You'll even be ready for 10K content (10240x4320 pixels) at some point in the 2030s. And by then we may not need screens anyway.

HDMI 2.2 cables, called Ultra96, will come with a QR code to prove they're genuine

WHY YOU MUST USE ChatGPT

Forget gimmicky and overpriced AI, and try the brilliant free tool that will genuinely improve your life. **Robert Irvine** explains everything you need to know about ChatGPT

Over the past two years, artificial intelligence has become inescapable, with virtually every big tech company dabbling in the technology. In many cases, such as Copilot in Windows, AI Overviews in Google Search and shopping assistant Rufus in Amazon's mobile app, AI features have been foisted on us whether we want them or not, causing annoyance rather than amazement at their capabilities.

These heavy-handed tactics make the success of ChatGPT all the more remarkable. With over 300 million weekly users (see www.snipca.com/53466), it's by far the most popular AI tool you can *choose* to use, which means you can discover its many benefits for yourself.

Despite the huge uptake, ChatGPT still has an undeserved reputation for being aimed at tech boffins; as one article asked: is it "just a new toy for nerds?" (www.snipca.com/53468). That couldn't be further from the truth, because not only is ChatGPT very easy to use, but it's also now free for – and intended for – everyone to enjoy.

In this feature, we reveal the secret benefits of ChatGPT that go beyond the well-known purposes of generating, summarising and rewriting text content. We explain how the AI assistant works, how to improve your interactions to get the best results and all the brilliant and surprising ways ChatGPT can improve your life.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

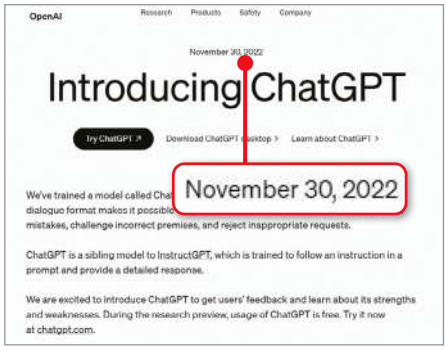
- Get started with ChatGPT by mastering its main options
- Search the web using ChatGPT to find accurate and up-to-date information
- Analyse the content of documents, web pages and photos
- Create original text and images by entering precise commands
- Use the Memory feature to improve ChatGPT's advice
- Talk aloud to ChatGPT like you're chatting to a friend
- Stop ChatGPT using your data for training purposes

YOUR CHATGPT QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is an artificial-intelligence chatbot, developed by the American AI-research company OpenAI (www.snipca.com/53434). It's designed to interact with users through natural language, providing answers and assistance on a wide variety of topics.

The GPT in its name stands for Generative Pre-trained Transformer, which are the type of large language models (LLMs) used by the chatbot. The 'generative' means ChatGPT can create new content based on existing data, while the 'transformer' neural network enables it to learn context and meaning by tracking the relationships between sequential data – such as words in a sentence.


OpenAI
Research
Products
Safety
Company
November 30, 2022
Introducing ChatGPT
Try ChatGPT
Download ChatGPT desktop
Learn about ChatGPT
November 30, 2022
We've trained a model called Cha
dialogue format makes it possibl
mistakes, challenge incorrect premises, and reject inappropriate requests.
ChatGPT is a sibling model to InstructGPT, which is trained to follow an instruction in a prompt and provide a detailed response.
We are excited to introduce ChatGPT to get users' feedback and learn about its strengths and weaknesses. During the research preview, usage of ChatGPT is free. Try it now at chatgpt.com.

OpenAI kickstarted the AI revolution when it launched ChatGPT in November 2022

When ChatGPT publicly launched on 30 November 2022 (see screenshot above), it was based on OpenAI's GPT-3.5 model. This was trained on 570GB of text data from the internet, including websites, books and academic papers, amounting to more than 300 billion words. It's since rapidly evolved to use more sophisticated AI models that significantly expand its capabilities.

How does ChatGPT work?

ChatGPT's main objective is to predict the next word in a sentence, based on what typically happened in the text data it's been trained on – like a super-advanced autocorrect. When you enter a question or prompt into ChatGPT, the chatbot uses its LLM to produce a response based on the information you've given and how that fits into its vast amount of training data.

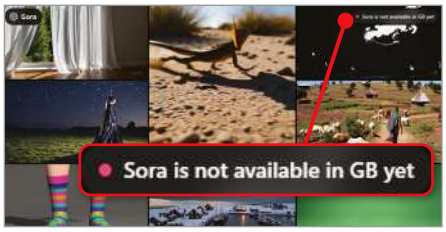
ChatGPT uses a combination of deep learning algorithms, natural-language processing and generative pre-training to provide friendly, accurate and human-like responses to text questions. The fact it can also generate stories, essays, letters and much more – as we'll explain – has only added to its appeal and popularity (and controversy, especially in areas such as education and copyright law).

The latest version of ChatGPT uses OpenAI's o1 model, which has been trained to generate long 'chains of thought' and perform even more complex tasks, such as solving science and maths problems (see www.snipca.com/53436).

Can ChatGPT generate images and videos?

Yes and no. ChatGPT uses OpenAI's image-generation model Dall-E 3 to create pictures from your text prompts. It can also analyse images you upload or paste into its message box to identify their content.

Currently, ChatGPT can't directly create videos. In December, OpenAI launched a new video-generation model called Sora (www.snipca.com/53437), which turns text and images into realistic videos. This is available to ChatGPT Plus and Pro subscribers as a standalone tool (rather than being integrated with the chatbot), but not yet in the UK or EU (see screenshot below).



OpenAI's new video-generation tool Sora isn't available yet in the UK

Is ChatGPT free to use?

Yes, OpenAI offers a choice of ChatGPT plans, including a free tier. This mainly uses its GPT-4o Mini model, with 'limited access' to the more advanced GPT-4o version. If you've asked too many questions within a five-hour period, ChatGPT Free downgrades you to GPT-4o Mini. It will notify you when this happens, and tell you when you can resume using GPT-4o again.

GPT-4o Mini provides less comprehensive answers – though for most queries you won't notice the difference – and places limits on certain features. Whichever model you use, the free version of ChatGPT limits you to generating three images a day, whereas ChatGPT Plus – which offers a greater choice of AI models and costs $20 (about £16) a month – provides unlimited image generation. ChatGPT Plus subscribers also get new features before free users, and advanced and 'extended' versions of the chatbot's tools.

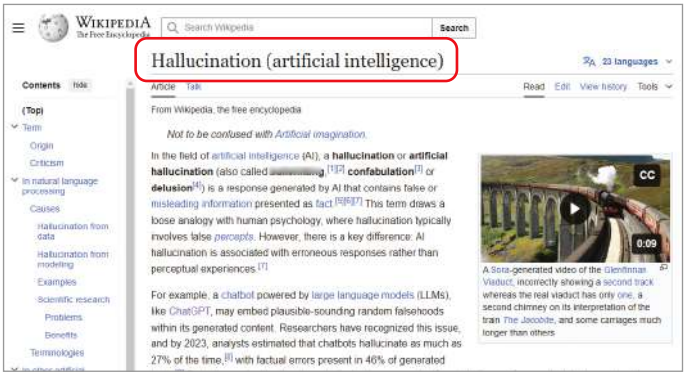
OpenAI additionally offers Pro, Team and Enterprise plans, but these are aimed at developers and businesses, with prices and features to match. See www.snipca.com/53443 for a comparison of the different plans.

What are the downsides to ChatGPT?

ChatGPT's helpful and authoritative responses can mislead you into believing everything it says. In our experience – and yours, judging by emails we've received – it sometimes provides inaccurate, biased or outdated information, even when answering simple questions.

This confident presentation of fiction as fact has been dubbed 'AI hallucination' (www.snipca.com/53442 – see screenshot below), and is caused by errors in the source data or in the LLM. ChatGPT's new web-search tool (see page 53) helps prevent hallucination by checking and citing trustworthy, up-to-date sources, but it's still not completely reliable.

There are also privacy concerns relating to ChatGPT's collection of user data for training purposes (as is common to all AI tools), and the risk of data breaches. We explain how to keep your chats private on page 57.

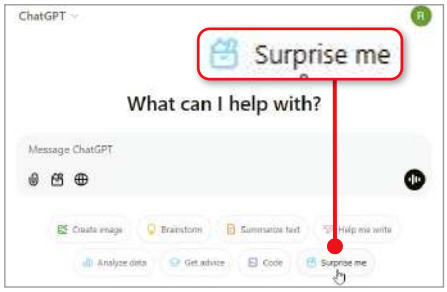

WIKIPEDIA
The Free Encyclopedia
Search Wikipedia
Search
Hallucination (artificial intelligence)
23 languages
Contents
Article
Talk
Read
Edit
View history
Tools
From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
Not to be confused with Artificial imagination.
In the field of artificial intelligence (AI), a hallucination or artificial hallucination (also called confabulation or delusion) is a response generated by AI that contains false or misleading information presented as fact.
This term draws a loose analogy with human psychology, where hallucination typically involves false percepts. However, there is a key difference: AI hallucination is associated with erroneous responses rather than perceptual experiences.
For example, a chatbot powered by large language models (LLMs), like ChatGPT, may embed plausible-sounding random falsehoods within its generated content. Researchers have recognized this issue, and by 2023, analysts estimated that chatbots hallucinate as much as 27% of the time, with factual errors present in 46% of generated
CC
0:09
A Sora-generated video of the Glenfinnan Viaduct, incorrectly showing a second track whereas the real viaduct has only one, a second chimney on its interpretation of the train The Jacobite, and some carriages much longer than others

ChatGPT sometimes 'hallucinates' by providing misleading information

HOW TO GET STARTED WITH CHATGPT

The simplest way to access ChatGPT is in your web browser – we'll explain alternative methods on page 56. Visit the ChatGPT website (www.snipca.com/53444) and click 'Sign up' to register for a free OpenAI account. You can save time by signing in using your Google, Microsoft or Apple account. Although OpenAI now lets you chat without creating an account (by clicking 'Try it first'), you won't get access to ChatGPT's other features, including file uploads, chat history and the new web search.

ChatGPT is very easy to use – simply type a question or command into the message box and either press Enter or click the up-arrow button to submit your text prompt. As you type, it will automatically suggest relevant prompts. Below the message box, you'll see buttons for common commands, such as 'Create image', 'Analyse data' and 'Summarise text', plus a 'Surprise me' option (see screenshot below) for when you're unsure what to ask.



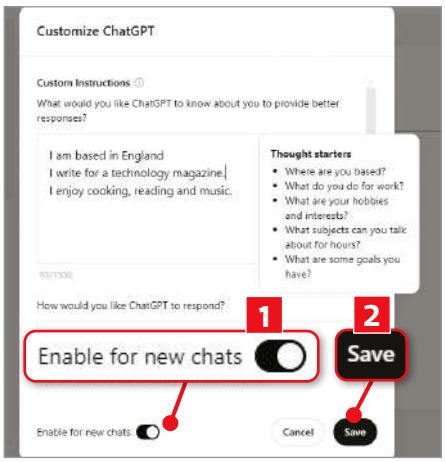
ChatGPT suggests commands to enter – or you can simply ask it to surprise you

Be creative with your ChatGPT prompts

Don't be afraid to be creative and experiment with your prompts. You can ask ChatGPT to produce text on just about anything, whether you want a plot for a detective story, a simple definition of black holes, or a speech for a wedding. It can generate songs, poems and jokes; newsletters, emails and how-to instructions; questions for quizzes and virtually any other other text content you require.

Commendably, OpenAI has strict rules that forbid ChatGPT from generating explicit content, engaging in hate speech and impersonating private individuals. It won't make predictions about the future, such as financial forecasts or who'll win sporting fixtures, or give its opinion on political, social and cultural issues.

When you're bored, it will happily engage in a friendly chinwag about how your day is going and suggest ways to make it more interesting.


Customize ChatGPT
Custom Instructions
What would you like ChatGPT to know about you to provide better responses?
I am based in England
I write for a technology magazine.
I enjoy cooking, reading and music.
Thought starters
Where are you based?
What do you do for work?
What are your hobbies and interests?
What subjects can you talk about for hours?
What are some goals you have?
How would you like ChatGPT to respond?
1
2
Enable for new chats
Save
Enable for new chats
Cancel
Save

Customise ChatGPT's responses to reflect your interests and preferences

Tailor ChatGPT's responses to your needs

ChatGPT saves your prompts and its responses to your chat history, so you can submit follow-up queries. This is helpful if you want more clarity or further information on a particular point.

Usefully, you can ask it to refine the answer you've received – for example, by asking it to "summarise the above in 100 words" or "explain this again in simpler terms". If you tell ChatGPT more about yourself, it can tailor the way it responds to you. To do so, click your profile icon in the top-right corner and choose Customize ChatGPT. In the first box, enter information such as where in the world you're based, what your interests are and any particular likes or dislikes – just don't share anything too personal.

The second box lets you give ChatGPT pointers on how it should respond to you by default. For example, you can set your preferred length of reply and the tone you want the bot to adopt. Ensure 'Enable for new chats' is switched on (1 in our screenshot left), then click Save 2.

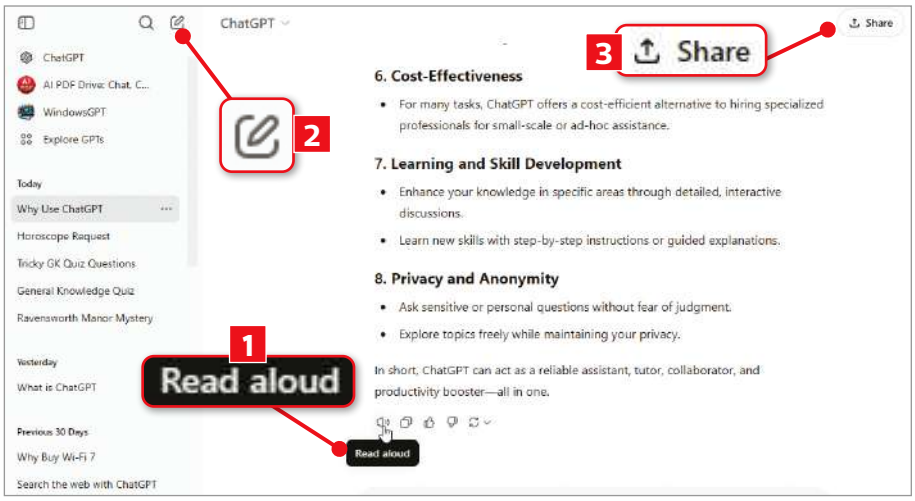
Master the main options in ChatGPT

You'll notice some small icons at the bottom of ChatGPT's responses. The speaker icon lets you hear the answer read aloud (1 in our screenshot below), while the Copy icon copies the text to your clipboard to paste elsewhere.

Next to these are 'Good response' (thumbs-up) and 'Bad response' (thumbs-down) icons. The final (circular-arrows) icon lets you choose between OpenAI's ChatGPT-4o and ChatGPT-4o mini models, depending on availability (see page 50). If it provides a poor response, you can either change the model or opt to 'Try again' with the current one and hopefully get more accurate information.

Sometimes you'll want your next question to ChatGPT to have no relation to the previous one. To start with a clean slate, click the 'New chat' (pencil) icon in the left-hand sidebar 2.

ChatGPT lets you share your conversations with other people, to save you copying and pasting big chunks of text. Click the Share button in the top-right corner 3, then click Create Link to copy a link to the current chat to your clipboard. To share a previous conversation, hover your cursor over its title in your chat history, click the three-dot icon and choose Share.


ChatGPT
Share
3
Share
2
1
Read aloud
Read aloud
6. Cost-Effectiveness
For many tasks, ChatGPT offers a cost-efficient alternative to hiring specialized professionals for small-scale or ad-hoc assistance.
7. Learning and Skill Development
Enhance your knowledge in specific areas through detailed, interactive discussions.
Learn new skills with step-by-step instructions or guided explanations.
8. Privacy and Anonymity
Ask sensitive or personal questions without fear of judgment.
Explore topics freely while maintaining your privacy.
In short, ChatGPT can act as a reliable assistant, tutor, collaborator, and productivity booster—all in one.
Today
Why Use ChatGPT
Horoscope Request
Tricky GK Quiz Questions
General Knowledge Quiz
Ravensworth Manor Mystery
Yesterday
What is ChatGPT
Previous 30 Days
Why Buy Wi-Fi 7
Search the web with ChatGPT

ChatGPT lets you hear responses read aloud and share your conversations

10 WAYS CHATGPT CAN IMPROVE YOUR LIFE

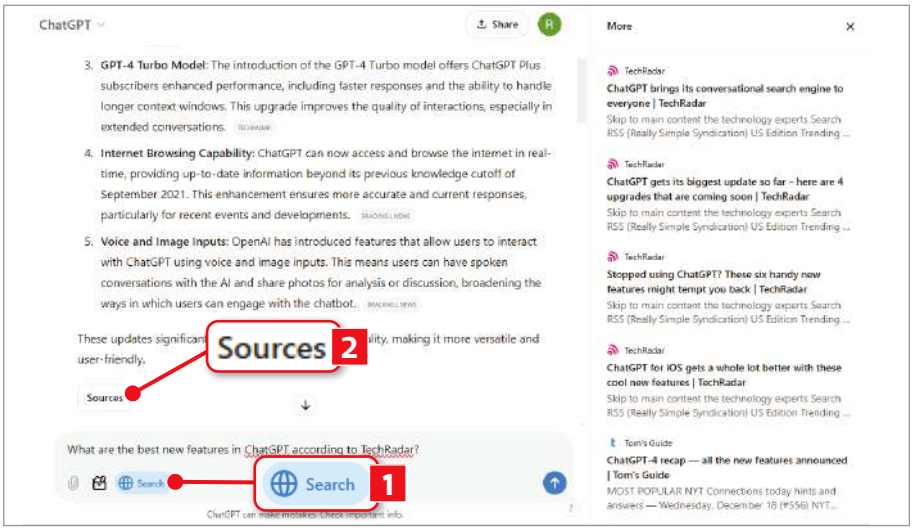
1 Ditch Google for a superior search engine

Google's search results are now plagued by ads and sponsored links, poor-quality sites that use SEO tricks to rank highly and filtered content based on data Google has collected about you, rather than what you're actually looking for. ChatGPT provides an alternative way to search the web that's free of ads (for the moment) and bias, and delivers more relevant and helpful results.

Since last December, all ChatGPT users have been able to use its new web-search tool directly from chats. Previously, it could only provide answers from the data it had been trained on, but it's now able to access up-to-date information from reliable online sources. The chatbot will automatically determine which of your queries require a web search. You can choose the option manually by clicking the Search (globe) icon in the message box (1 in our screenshot below).

ChatGPT tailors its concise but comprehensive answers to match your questions, including images and videos where applicable. It also tells you which sites it's used to generate its response – click the Sources button 2 for a full list, and to visit the relevant pages to learn more.

Unlike Google, ChatGPT lets you refine your search results by asking follow-up questions, without needing to search again. You can also ask it to search specific sites, for example: "What are the best new features in ChatGPT according to TechRadar?", and within a particular time frame.


ChatGPT
Share
More
3. GPT-4 Turbo Model: The introduction of the GPT-4 Turbo model offers ChatGPT Plus subscribers enhanced performance, including faster responses and the ability to handle longer context windows. This upgrade improves the quality of interactions, especially in extended conversations.
4. Internet Browsing Capability: ChatGPT can now access and browse the internet in real-time, providing up-to-date information beyond its previous knowledge cutoff of September 2021. This enhancement ensures more accurate and current responses, particularly for recent events and developments.
5. Voice and Image Inputs: OpenAI has introduced features that allow users to interact with ChatGPT using voice and image inputs. This means users can have spoken conversations with the AI and share photos for analysis or discussion, broadening the ways in which users can engage with the chatbot.
These updates significant
lity, making it more versatile and user-friendly.
Sources
2
Sources
What are the best new features in ChatGPT according to TechRadar?
Search
Search
1
ChatGPT can make mistakes. Check important info.
More
TechRadar
ChatGPT brings its conversational search engine to everyone | TechRadar
Skip to main content the technology experts Search RSS (Really Simple Syndication) US Edition Trending ...
TechRadar
ChatGPT gets its biggest update so far – here are 4 upgrades that are coming soon | TechRadar
Skip to main content the technology experts Search RSS (Really Simple Syndication) US Edition Trending ...
TechRadar
Stopped using ChatGPT? These six handy new features might tempt you back | TechRadar
Skip to main content the technology experts Search RSS (Really Simple Syndication) US Edition Trending ...
TechRadar
ChatGPT for iOS gets a whole lot better with these cool new features | TechRadar
Skip to main content the technology experts Search RSS (Really Simple Syndication) US Edition Trending ...
Tom's Guide
ChatGPT-4 recap — all the new features announced | Tom's Guide
MOST POPULAR NYT Connections today hints and answers — Wednesday, December 18 (#556) NYT...

ChatGPT's new web-search tool provides an ad-free alternative to Google

2 Hold natural voice conversations

Although Amazon Alexa, Google Assistant and Apple's Siri can answer simple questions, trying to carry out a conversation with them can feel stilted and frustrating, leaving you under no illusion that you're addressing a robot. In contrast, using ChatGPT's voice mode is like talking to a (human) friend, allowing for more natural interactions.

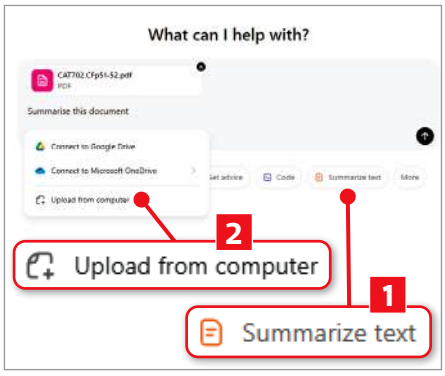
Standard voice mode is available to all ChatGPT users and employs text-to-speech technology to answer your questions. Advanced voice mode (included with paid-for plans) is considerably more impressive, using AI models to 'hear' and generate audio.

This results in fluent conversations in which ChatGPT picks up on non-verbal cues, such as the speed you're talking, the tone of your voice and your interruptions, and responds with appropriate emotions. You get a free 10-minute preview of advanced mode every month, before reverting to the standard version.

To access the feature on the ChatGPT website, click the 'Voice mode' button in the message box, select a voice and click 'Start new chat'. You'll need to grant it access to your PC's microphone. However, the most convenient way to use voice mode is through ChatGPT's mobile app – see page 56.

3 Get the gist of complex documents

ChatGPT can summarise and decipher long documents and extract the most important details. Examples include official letters and reports, legal agreements and contracts, website and software privacy policies, hardware manuals and much more.



ChatGPT can summarise the content of documents and web pages

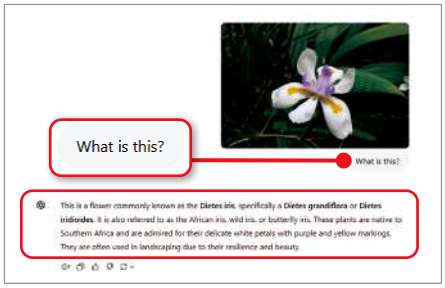
Click the 'Summarize text' button (1 in our screenshot above) below the message box and either copy and paste the text into ChatGPT or click the 'Attach a file' paperclip button. The file can be uploaded from your computer 2 or imported from Google Drive or OneDrive. However, you only have access to these options when using the GPT-4o model – the Mini version doesn't support file uploads or imports and the 'Attach files' button will be greyed out.

ChatGPT supports documents in PDF, DOCX and TXT format, up to a maximum of 25,000 words or 512MB in size. It can also analyse XLSX and CSV spreadsheets.

As well as summarising the document, ChatGPT can answer questions about specific aspects of the content, and look up relevant information online. It can also summarise the content of web pages – just paste their text or URL into its message box.

4 Identify the subject of photos

ChatGPT's image-recognition feature analyses pictures to provide detailed descriptions of their subjects and backgrounds (see screenshot below). It can (sometimes) tell you which decade a


What is this?
What is this?
This is a flower commonly known as the Dietes iris, specifically a Dietes grandiflora or Dietes bicolor. It is also referred to as the African iris, wild iris, or butterfly iris. These plants are native to Southern Africa and are admired for their delicate white petals with purple and yellow markings. They are often used in landscaping due to their resilience and beauty.

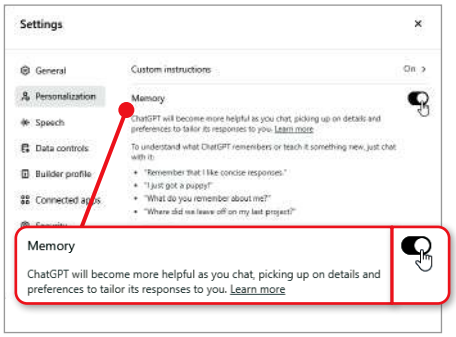
ChatGPT can identify the subjects of images you upload from your PC

photo was taken in, and even translate foreign text in an image into English.

As with documents, you can either upload image files from your PC, or add them from Google Drive or OneDrive. Alternatively, copy a picture from a web page, paste it into the message box and enter your query.

ChatGPT can also use 'reasoning' to tell you more about the subject of an image. For example, if you upload a photo of a book cover, it can provide a summary of its content.

Enter text prompts to generate two images a day using the Dall-E 3 model



Activate ChatGPT's Memory feature to get more relevant recommendations

5 Generate your own images

As we mentioned on page 51, ChatGPT's free plan limits you to creating three images a day, which is quite stingy compared to rival AI tools. Even Microsoft Copilot, which also uses the Dall-E 3 model, lets you generate 15 images a day.

However, it's still worth a try to see how successfully ChatGPT can turn your text prompts into pictures. Click the 'View tools' icon in the message box and select 'Picture – Use Dall-E' (1 in our screenshot above right) to switch to Picture mode. Describe the image you want to create, including as much detail as possible, and ChatGPT will present you with its visual interpretation.

You can save the result to your PC by clicking the Download button in the top-right corner 2. ChatGPT will offer to make adjustments to the picture, but you only get two tweaks as part of your daily quota. Hopefully, OpenAI will increase the image-creation limit for free users soon.

6 Ask ChatGPT for recommendations

Now that ChatGPT includes a web-search feature that draws on reliable and up-to-date sources, it's better than ever at providing recommendations. When you're looking for something new to read, watch or listen to, simply ask ChatGPT to recommend suitable books, TV shows, films and music. Similarly, you can ask for buying advice for different types of products, holiday inspiration (and itineraries), culinary ideas and much more.

Obviously, the more precise you are about your preferences, the more relevant its results will be, but even in response to general prompts its recommendations are usually eclectic and interesting. You can improve ChatGPT's accuracy using its

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JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **11 February 2025**. It's a lifetime licence for one computer.

Memory feature, which stores details of things you like for future reference.

To activate this option, click your profile icon in the top-right corner, choose Settings then Personalization and switch on Memory (see screenshot left). Ensure that ChatGPT memorises the information you want by entering commands such as "Remember my favourite film is *The Godfather*" and "Remember I don't like spicy food". It will reply "Got it!" and tailor its suggestions accordingly.

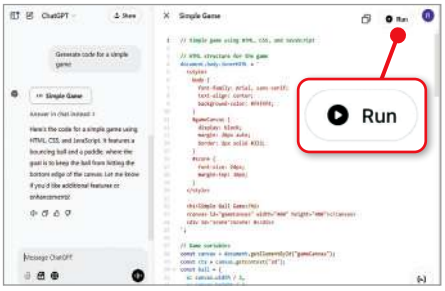
7 Generate code for websites, apps and games

Writing complex computer code was once the preserve of software developers and programmers, but ChatGPT allows anyone to have a go. Rather than master the intricacies of HTML, JavaScript, CSS, Python and other programming languages, you can ask the chatbot to generate code for you.

This could be for a basic website, app or game: just tell ChatGPT what you want and its new Canvas mode will display the code in a new window. Click 'Run' (see screenshot below) to preview the result, then click Copy to save the code to your clipboard.

You can also share the code with other people to collaborate on projects. When you're using GPT-4o Mini, which doesn't support Canvas, the code will appear in the main chat, without the Run option.

Some developers have questioned the accuracy and functionality of ChatGPT's code for larger projects, but it's useful and reliable for the tedious chore of 'debugging' (finding and fixing errors), and for generating and refining snippets.



ChatGPT can generate code for creating and refining websites and apps

8 Learn a foreign language

As well as translating foreign text from web pages, documents and images, ChatGPT can help you learn a new language and improve your skills in a particular lingo. Tell it which language you want to master and the chatbot will explain how it can assist you.

ChatGPT helps with building your vocabulary and learning common phrases through word lists, flashcards and quizzes; practising your conversation skills by interacting with ChatGPT in your chosen language (see screenshot below) – either via text chat or voice mode; and perfecting your spelling and grammar.

You can also ask ChatGPT to create a lesson plan that suits your level of experience and available time, and set you tests to measure your progress. It will also recommend dedicated language-learning tools and resources.

Learn to speak a foreign language by interacting with ChatGPT

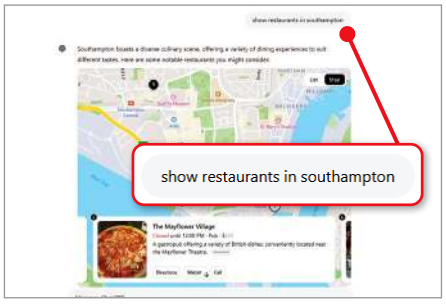
Expand ChatGPT using custom GPTs

Once you've mastered the basics of ChatGPT, you can expand its capabilities using custom GPTs. Similar to extensions for web browsers, these add extra features to the chatbot, which perform specific tasks from within the main interface.

GPTs are now available to all ChatGPT users (though only paid-for subscribers can create their own) and are available from the GPTs Store (www.snipca.com/53452) – click Explore GPTs in ChatGPT's left-hand sidebar to access this directly. There are millions of custom GPTs to choose from, of varying quality and usefulness, sorted into categories such as Writing, Programming and Lifestyle.

Popular tools include AI PDF Drive, which creates and extracts text from PDFs; Video GPT, which turns text prompts into videos; and Image Generator, which beats the image-creation limit for free users.

To add one to ChatGPT, just click the Start Chat button – note that GPTs aren't available when using the GPT-4o Mini model.



The new web-search feature in ChatGPT can provide directions and maps

9 Get travel directions and updates

ChatGPT can't yet compare with Google Maps for navigational help, but its new web-search tool unlocks lots of useful travel and local information. You can ask it for turn-by-turn directions for driving, cycling and walking; get traffic updates (and the weather forecast) for main roads; and request maps for specific areas.

It will also show you where to find amenities such as restaurants (see screenshot above), public toilets and transport hubs, using data from online sources. The ChatGPT mobile app has just introduced the option to use your preferred mapping service, such as Google Maps or Apple Maps, but not yet in the free plan in the UK.

10 Write letters to companies

ChatGPT makes the often difficult task of writing letters and emails to companies incredibly easy. It's particularly useful for helping you make complaints, request refunds and resolve disputes, generating text in a firm and formal tone that doesn't come naturally to many people.

Tell ChatGPT who you want to write the letter to, the purpose of your correspondence (such as complaint, request or application) and the points you want to include. The chatbot will respond with a template (see screenshot below) that includes suitable formatting and impressively detailed text. You can refine the content by suggesting adjustments to the tone and included information.

ChatGPT can generate formal complaint letters to companies

MORE SUPERB WAYS TO USE CHATGPT

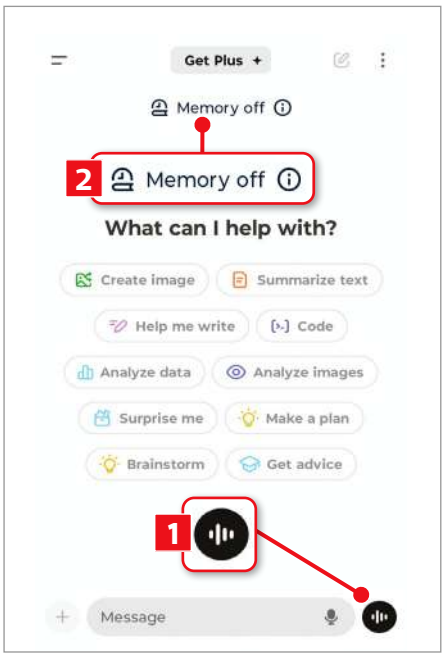
Use ChatGPT on your phone or tablet

ChatGPT's free app for Android (www.snipca.com/53453) and iOS (www.snipca.com/53454) brings all the features of the web-based version to your phone or tablet – including custom GPTs (see page 55). As mentioned earlier, it makes voice mode even more convenient because you can simply tap the button in the bottom-right corner (1 in our screenshot below) to start a conversation. Change the voice and switch from speaker to phone output (as if you're on a call) by tapping the icon in the top-right corner of the voice-mode screen.

The mobile app lets you ask ChatGPT about photos you've taken with your device's camera – not just identifying the subject, but looking up further information such as how to fix a problem with your bike or cook a set of ingredients. You can also extract text from screenshots and documents you 'scan' with your camera.

Your chat history is automatically synced with the ChatGPT website, and the same restrictions apply regarding the GPT-4o and Mini models. However, the Memory feature 2 works separately from the website, so you can control whether the app 'remembers' your preferences.

As of iOS 18.2, released last December, you can use ChatGPT to improve Siri on iPhones and iPads that support the new Apple Intelligence feature. Open Settings, select 'Siri & Search', then Apple Intelligence and switch on ChatGPT.



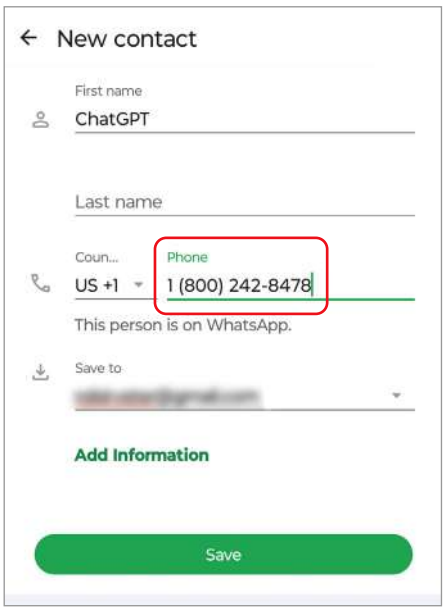
Tap the 'Voice mode' button in the ChatGPT app to start a conversation

Message ChatGPT in WhatsApp

At the end of 2024, OpenAI launched a curious feature that lets you phone ChatGPT as if you were ringing a real person on a landline. Currently only available in the US and Canada, it involves dialling 1-800-CHATGPT (1-800-242-8478) to speak to the chatbot – you can talk for up to 15 minutes a month for free.

In tandem with this service, OpenAI introduced the ability to message ChatGPT on WhatsApp. Again, this is supposed to be limited to American and Canadian users, but there is a workaround – and you don't even need the ChatGPT app installed on your phone.

Open WhatsApp, tap the green plus sign and choose 'New contact'. Set 'ChatGPT' as the first name, then tap the dropdown menu under Country and select United States. Enter the number 1-800-242-8478 (see screenshot above right) and press Save.



Add ChatGPT to your WhatsApp contacts for another way to chat

ChatGPT will now be added to your contacts, so you can message it in WhatsApp as you would a real person – or technically like a business, which is how the number is saved.

Ditch Copilot for ChatGPT in Windows

Although Microsoft's Copilot tool is now the default AI assistant in Windows 10 and 11, ChatGPT is faster, less bloated and more informative. Both use versions of OpenAI's GPT-4 model, but Copilot is unsurprisingly biased towards Microsoft's search engine Bing (it was originally called Bing Chat).

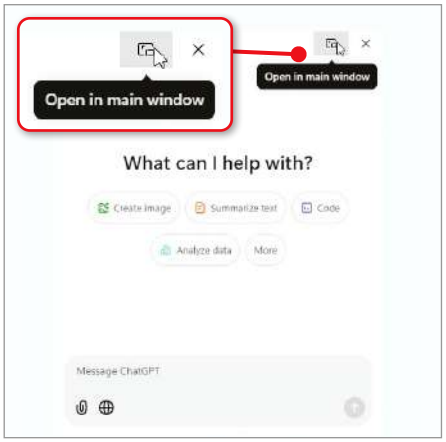
To use ChatGPT on your PC instead, install its free desktop app from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/53458) and sign into your OpenAI account to

Will OpenAI launch a ChatGPT browser?

With ChatGPT's web-search tool now providing a reliable alternative to Google (see page 53), OpenAI may next take on Chrome by launching its own web browser. The company has reportedly hired two developers who were 'instrumental' in making Chrome for Google and could help it create a browser with integrated ChatGPT (see www.snipca.com/53465).

Rumours point to Operator, an AI agent framework OpenAI is set to release later this year as a strong indication it will launch a browser. The agent will go beyond the current capabilities of ChatGPT to perform tasks on behalf of users on computers and the web.

We don't know exactly what that browser might look like, and judging from what's been reported, it's still in the early stages. However, with several browsers now offering their own AI assistants, it's the next logical step for ChatGPT – and Google should be worried.



Launch a compact version of ChatGPT's desktop app by pressing Alt+Space

start chatting. As with the mobile app it offers all the features of the ChatGPT website – including web search, file analysis, image generation, voice mode and custom GPTs – and syncs your chat history across devices.

It saves you needing to open your browser every time you want to ask something, and allows you to use ChatGPT in a 'companion window' alongside other programs, and move it around your screen. Launch a compact version of the chatbot by pressing Alt+Space on your keyboard, then click the icon in the top-right corner (see screenshot below left) to open its main window.

Access ChatGPT using a browser extension

Many web browsers now have their own AI assistants – including Copilot in Edge, Leo in Brave, Aria in Opera, and Gemini in Chrome (though currently only in the US). These all have their advantages, but if you prefer to use ChatGPT you can add it to your browser by installing an extension.

OpenAI's official ChatGPT Search extension (www.snipca.com/53351) sets ChatGPT as your browser's default search engine. Type a search query in the address bar and press Enter to open the answer in a new ChatGPT tab (you'll need to be signed into your account).

Alternatively, to keep your current search engine and just use ChatGPT when required, you can add the chatbot to your browser's search options. We explained how to do this in our Browser Tips section in Issue 701 (page 42).

Stay private when using ChatGPT

As we've explained, the more you tell ChatGPT about yourself, the more accurate its responses become, but this also raises privacy concerns – especially because your data is used to 'train' the tool. However, there are ways to prevent it from knowing too much and building a profile of you.

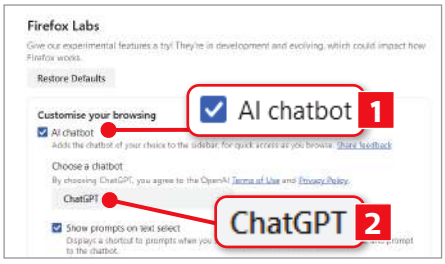
To stop your queries being used to train ChatGPT, click your profile icon in the top-right corner and choose Settings, then 'Data controls' (1 in our screenshot). Click 'Improve the model for everyone', switch the option off 2 then click Done.

To wipe your ChatGPT history, select General in the Settings box and click the 'Delete all' button next to 'Delete all chats'. Alternatively, delete specific conversations from your chat history by hovering your cursor over their titles in the left-hand sidebar and selecting Delete.

Finally, if you've used the Memory feature (see page 54) to personalise ChatGPT's recommendations, but now want to *depersonalise* them, select Personalization in Settings, switch off Memory and click 'Clear memories'.

There are lots of third-party ChatGPT extensions that bring some of its features to your browser without overriding any settings. Sadly, many collect your data and force you to pay a subscription that's separate from the one for ChatGPT Plus.

Our favourite free tool is the Chromium extension 'ChatGPT – Summarize & Chat' (www.snipca.com/53459), which summarises the content of web pages, PDFs and YouTube videos (from their transcripts) using ChatGPT (see screenshot below). It also has an 'Ask question' feature, but for this you need an OpenAI API key, which is no longer available for free (other ChatGPT extensions have a similar restriction).

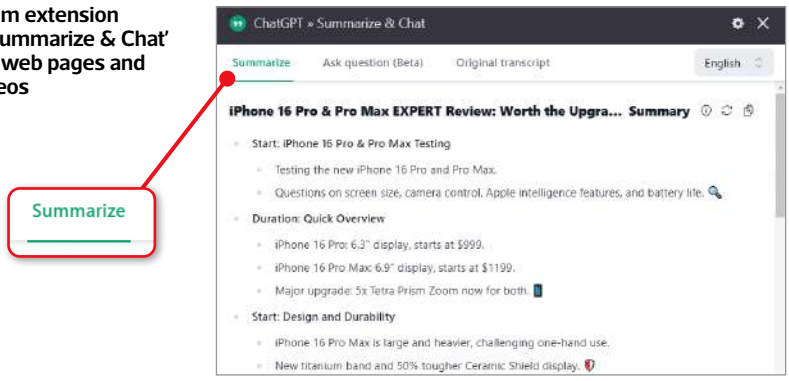


Activate ChatGPT in Firefox Labs to access the chatbot in the browser

Firefox is the only major browser to offer built-in (but experimental) access to ChatGPT, though this may change now Mozilla has created its own AI assistant (see page 42). Click the three-line menu button and choose Settings then Firefox Labs. Tick the 'AI chatbot' box (1 in our screenshot above) and select ChatGPT 2 to open the AI tool in Firefox's sidebar.

Tick the box 'Show prompts on text select' to add a ChatGPT shortcut to Firefox's right-click menu. You can then right-click selected text on a web page to get the AI assistant to summarise the content. ca

The Chromium extension 'ChatGPT – Summarize & Chat' summarises web pages and YouTube videos


ChatGPT » Summarize & Chat
Summarize
Ask question (Beta)
Original transcript
English
iPhone 16 Pro & Pro Max EXPERT Review: Worth the Upgra... Summary
Start: iPhone 16 Pro & Pro Max Testing
Testing the new iPhone 16 Pro and Pro Max.
Questions on screen size, camera control, Apple Intelligence features, and battery life.
Duration: Quick Overview
iPhone 16 Pro: 6.3" display, starts at $999.
iPhone 16 Pro Max: 6.9" display, starts at $1199.
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12 BLACK FRIDAY BARGAINS YOU MUST BUY
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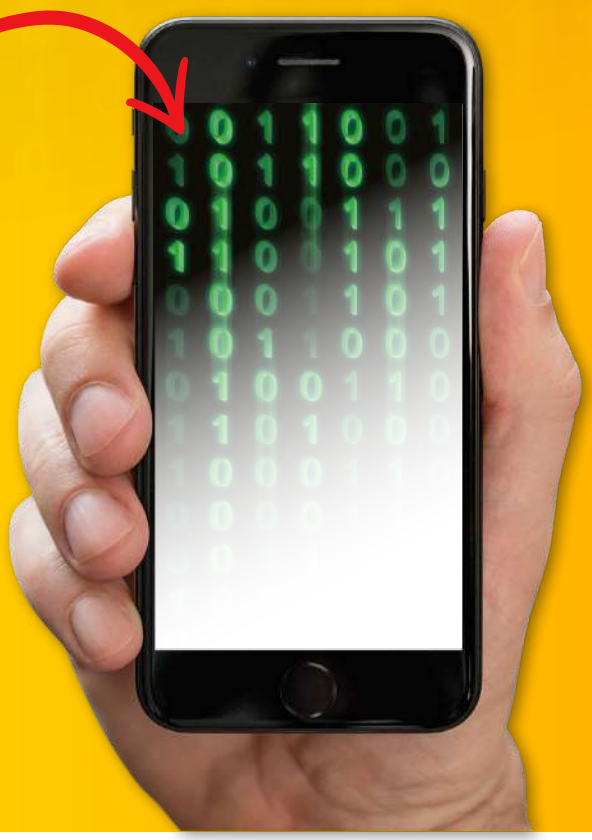
Wipe data from your old phones



Whether you're giving a phone to a friend or trading it in, it's vital you erase all your personal information – and that requires more than a factory reset. **Daniel Booth** explains what you must do

Many people don't know how to wipe data from their old devices. According to recent research from the UK's Information Commissioner's Office (www.snipca.com/53379) – which upholds the data privacy of individuals – 29 per cent of Brits lack the skills to erase files from phones, tablets and computers.

This matters because most of us don't keep old devices once we've stopped using them, and this is particularly true of phones. A YouGov poll last year found that 42 per cent of people pass on phones to people they know, while 24 per cent trade them in to get money off a new device (www.snipca.com/53526).

Why a factory reset isn't enough

The biggest mistake you can make when wiping your data is to assume a factory reset is enough. You should do this as a matter of course because it wipes all your personal data, including files, apps, passwords, settings and accounts. But it's not sufficient on its own because some information might remain, including system logs and cached data.

System logs are kept by the operating system and apps to record significant events, such as your phone crashing. Cached data is temporary files stored by apps and websites to ensure they load faster and work more smoothly.

Recovering this data isn't easy, but it can be done with specialised software that criminals use. So after you perform a factory reset, you might want to overwrite your data (which makes it impossible to retrieve). Oh, and once you've finished, don't forget to remove your SIM, SD and microSD card. But before all that, let's explain how to back up your files.

Back up your data

When backing up from an **iPhone** you need to decide whether to save files to Apple iCloud or to your computer (Mac or Windows). If the former, check whether iCloud's 5GB free limit will be enough. You can see how much storage you've used by opening Settings on your iPhone, then tapping your name followed by 'iCloud'. If you need more space, you'll have to upgrade to one of the paid-for plans, which start at 99p a month for 50GB (www.snipca.com/53519).

You don't need to plug your phone into a computer to back up to iCloud – it's all done over Wi-Fi. Open Settings, then tap your name followed by iCloud, then iCloud Backup. Finally, tap Back Up Now (see screenshot below left).

9:41
iCloud
Backup
iCloud Backup
Automatically back up your iPhone so you can restore your data if you lose your device or get a new one. Learn More
Back Up This iPhone
Back Up Over Cellular
When not connected to Wi-Fi, use your cellular network to automatically back up to iCloud. This may cause you to exceed your cellular data plan.
Back Up Now
Last successful backup: 9:40 AM

Tap 'Back Up Now' to manually back up your iPhone data before a factory reset

To back up your iPhone using a Windows computer, first connect them using a Lightning-to-USB or -USB-C cable. Open the iTunes app on your computer, then click the iPhone button near the top left of the iTunes window. Next, click Summary followed by Back Up Now (below Backups). To see the backups stored on your computer, click Edit followed by Preferences, then Devices.

Backing up an **Android** phone sends your data to your Google Account, then stores it in Google Drive. So before you start, check how much space remains by signing into Drive then looking at the figure below Storage at the bottom of the menu on the left. Google gives you 15GB for free, shared across Gmail, Drive and Photos. For more you'll need to sign up to a Google One package, starting at £1.59 a month for 100GB (www.snipca.com/53520).

As with all Android instructions, how you back up will vary based on how the manufacturer has customised the operating system on their phone. However, the instructions are usually simple and shouldn't vary too much from the following: open your phone's Settings, and tap Google followed by Backup, then 'Back up now'.

Sign out of all your accounts

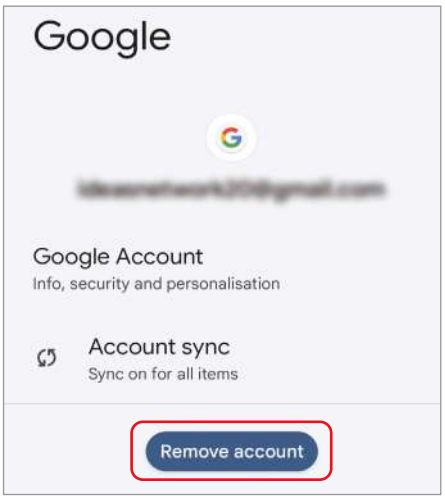
Once your data has been backed up you need to sign out of all the accounts linked to your phone, stopping the next owner from accessing them (whether deliberately to cause harm, or unintentionally).

On **iPhones**, you need to sign out of your Apple ID and disable 'Find My iPhone'. Open Settings, then tap your name followed by 'Find My [name of device]' and turn off 'Find My [name of device]'. This also turns off Activation Lock, which prevents unauthorised use if the iPhone is lost or stolen.

Next, sign out of iCloud, and the 'iTunes & App Store'. Tap your name again, then Sign Out. Now enter your Apple Account password and tap Turn Off. If you're switching to a non-Apple phone, you should also deactivate your iMessage account – see Apple's instructions at www.snipca.com/53524.

Finally, remove your iPhone from your list of Trusted Devices so it no longer receives codes for two-factor authentication (2FA). Tap your name then 'Password & Security' followed by Trusted Devices. Choose the device you want to remove, then tap 'Remove from Account'. If you paid for an AppleCare insurance and repair plan for the phone, cancel it at www.snipca.com/53522.

On **Android**, open Settings, then tap 'Passwords and accounts' (it might be just called Accounts). Select your Google account then tap 'Remove account' twice (see screenshot below). This will prevent anyone from accessing your personal data linked to Google services, such as Gmail and Google Drive. Also remove social-media and messaging accounts, like Facebook and WhatsApp, and unpair devices connected via Bluetooth.



Click 'Remove account' twice to disable your Google account on your Android phone

Do you also need to encrypt your phone?

Yes, but only if it's *very* old. **iPhones** running iOS 7 – released back in 2013 – and earlier weren't encrypted by default, so it's worth encrypting those before passing them on. The same applies for **Android** phones running 5.0 – released in 2014 – and earlier. All phones released since then are encrypted, so a factory reset is enough.

If you do have one of those ancient iPhones, encrypt your data by opening Settings, then tapping 'Touch ID & Passcode' followed by Turn Passcode On. Now create a six-digit passcode.

On an old Android phone, tap Settings, Security, Encryption, then 'Encrypt phone'. You'll be prompted to plug in your phone to charge it as it encrypts. Now set a PIN, password or lock screen to access your encrypted files.

Once encrypted, your data will be unreadable to anyone who tries to access it. Only you will have the PIN or password needed to unscramble it.

Next, tap 'Security and privacy' (or just Security, or sometimes Location), followed by Find My Device and turn it off. Also switch off all Location sliders and settings in that section. Now disable the screen lock, so the new owner won't need to type a passcode to use the phone. This is safe to do because all your data will have been erased at this point.

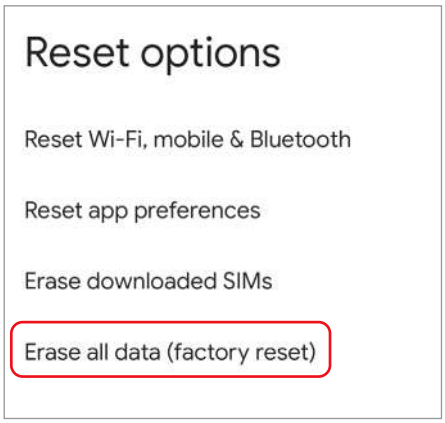
Finally, remove your phone as a trusted device. Sign into your Google account online, click Security on the left, then scroll down to the 'Your devices' box and click 'Manage all devices'. Now click the phone's entry followed by 'Sign out'.

Factory-reset your phone

Now, finally, you're ready to carry out a factory reset on your phone. Open your **iPhone's** Settings then tap General followed by 'Transfer or Reset iPhone'. Next, tap 'Erase All Content and Settings' (see screenshot below right) and if prompted, enter your iPhone passcode or Apple account password.

You're then given the option to erase your eSIM, if you have one. If you do this, remember to contact your network to reactivate your account. You'll now see everything that's about to be erased. If you're happy with that, tap Continue to confirm, then wait a few minutes for the process to complete.

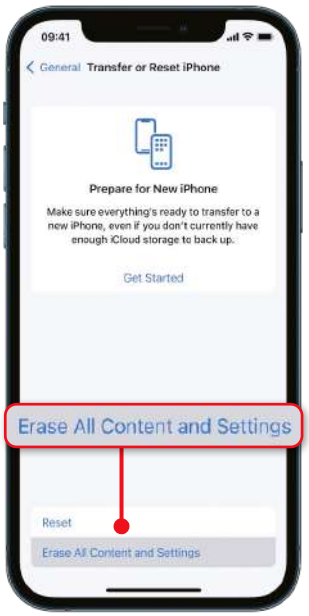
As before, instructions for **Android** will vary by device, but on a Google Pixel 4a phone, for example, open Settings then tap System followed by 'Reset options'. Now choose 'Erase all data (factory reset)' – see screenshot above. Also look for an option to erase downloaded SIMs.



Tap 'Erase all data (factory reset)' to reset your Android phone to its factory settings

By this point your phone will be a blank slate for the owner, but you can go even further by overwriting (or 'shredding') any remaining files with junk data, making it impossible f or anyone to recover them. However, this will be overkill for most people, and Apple long ago removed apps that do it, saying the combination of encryption and factory reset is sufficient.

Google is less strict, allowing some data-shredding apps. The best is iShredder (www.snipca.com/53525), though it's only worth the hassle if you're extremely concerned about what might be left on your phone. ca


09:41
General
Transfer or Reset iPhone
Prepare for New iPhone
Make sure everything's ready to transfer to a new iPhone, even if you don't currently have enough iCloud storage to back up.
Get Started
Erase All Content and Settings
Reset
Erase All Content and Settings

Tap 'Erase All Content and Settings' to return your iPhone to factory settings

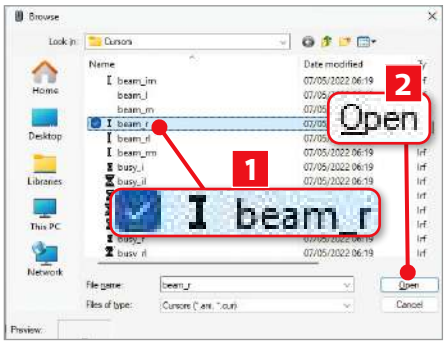
Don't upgrade to Windows 11 24H2

Microsoft's latest Windows update is causing all manner of problems. **Robert Irvine** explains how to fix them and how to get 24H2's best new tools without installing it

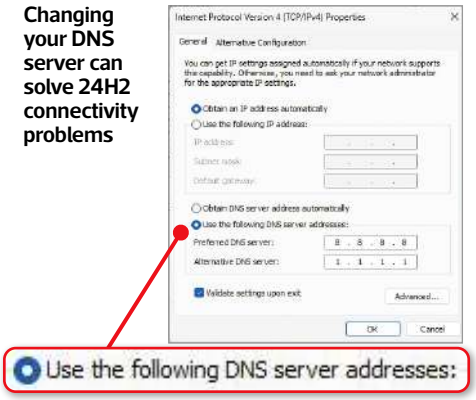
Even Microsoft must admit that the release of Windows 11 24H2 has been an unmitigated disaster. Since it began 'rolling out' last October, the update has been beset by problems and new bugs are still being discovered (see www.snipca.com/53495).

These range from Disk Cleanup misreporting how much data can be deleted to driver incompatibility causing the Blue Screen of Death. If you've already upgraded to 24H2, you've probably experienced some issues yourself, and are patiently waiting for Microsoft to fix them.

Here, we explain how to fix common 24H2 problems, and – if you haven't upgraded – how to avoid the bother by getting its best tools from third-party software. You can pause the installation of the 24H2 update by going to Settings, Windows Update, 'Pause updates' and choosing 'Pause for 1 week'.



Restore your missing cursor by tweaking your mouse settings



Changing your DNS server can solve 24H2 connectivity problems

How to fix Windows 11 24H2 problems

Blocked security updates

As we reported in Issue 701 (page 6), Windows users who installed the 24H2 update from a USB stick or CD/DVD between 8 October and 12 November 2024 may be unable to receive critical security patches in future, leaving them open to attacks. Microsoft has advised users who want to install 24H2 from physical media to download a patched version of the update from its website (www.snipca.com/53470), though this won't fix other problems.

Disappearing mouse cursor

The 24H2 update may cause your mouse cursor to disappear when you click text fields in programs including Chrome and Edge. To fix this problem, type control panel in the search box and press Enter to open the Control Panel. Select 'Hardware and Sound', click Mouse under 'Devices and Printers' and click the Pointers tab. Choose 'Text Select' in the Customise box, then click the Browse button and select the cursor called 'beam_r' (1 in our screenshot above). Click 'Open' 2, then OK to restore your missing cursor.

Inaccurate colours in games

Many gamers have found that colours in games look inaccurate after installing 24H2 and that some games are freezing and crashing. These problems are caused by a Windows 11 feature called Auto HDR, which is supposed to *improve* the visual quality of games.

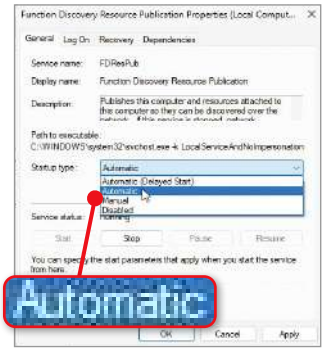
Disabling Auto HDR will fix these issues. Open the Settings app and choose System, then Display. Select 'Graphics' and switch off the Auto HDR option.

Lost internet connection

One of the most serious 24H2 problems prevents PCs from connecting to the internet. This is caused by the DHCP (Dynamic Host Control Protocol) feature in Windows 11 failing to provide a valid IP address.

One solution is to change your DNS server to use a set IP address. Type View network connections in the search box and press Enter. When the Network Connections box opens, right-click your Wi-Fi or Ethernet connection and choose Properties.

Double-click 'Internet Protocol Version 4 (TCP/IPv4)' and select 'Use the following DNS server addresses' (see screenshot above). Enter the preferred DNS address 8.8.8.8 (which is Google's DNS server) and the alternative address 1.1.1.1 (which is Cloudflare's) – or vice versa. Click 'OK' to switch to the new DNS server and hopefully restore your connection – if not, try restarting your PC.



Fix the 24H2 network-sharing problem by tweaking this setting

Network sharing unavailable

Another 24H2 problem affects the network-sharing feature in Windows 11. Either the main PC or other devices on the network are failing to appear in the network list, which means you can't share files and printers between computers.

This glitch is caused by a feature called Function Discovery Resource Publication (FDResPub), which makes Windows 11 PCs visible on your network. Following the 24H2 update, FDResPub no longer starts automatically, but there is a potential fix. Press Windows key+R to open the Run box, type services.msc and press Enter. Double-click 'Function Discovery Resource Publication', change its startup type to Automatic (see screenshot above) then click OK.

Broken clipboard history

The 'Clipboard history' feature in Windows 11 is another 24H2 casualty, with many users complaining that it's no longer storing anything they copy to their clipboards. Thankfully, this problem is easy to fix.

Open the Settings app and choose System, then Clipboard. Switch off the 'Suggested actions' option then open 'Clipboard history' by pressing Windows key+V. Your copied items should now be visible. If not, try disabling and re-enabling 'Clipboard history'.

Get 24H2's best features without upgrading

Improve your file management

Windows 11 24H2 adds several new features to File Explorer, including the ability to compress files and folders into 7z archives, as well as the ZIP format (see screenshot above right). It also lets you view and edit the metadata for PNG files; duplicate tabs to open two views of the same folder; and perform essential actions such as Copy, Rename and Delete more easily by clicking large buttons.

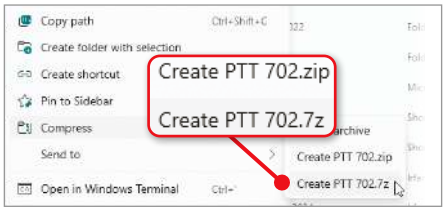
Impressive though these improvements are, they've long been available in the fantastic free file manager Files (www.snipca.com/53485 – click the 'classic installer' link to download the free version). This app is frequently updated with new features that make even the new File Explorer look dated.

Uninstall the Windows 11 24H2 update

If you've already installed the 24H2 update and are experiencing problems or anticipating them, you can uninstall it until Microsoft has fixed every bug. However, you must do so within 10 days of upgrading, before the old installation files are automatically deleted.

Open the Settings app and choose Windows Update then 'Advanced options'. Select 'Recovery' and click the 'Go back' button, then 'Get started'. Follow the instructions to uninstall the 24H2 update and roll back to Windows 11 23H2.

If the 10-day window has expired and the 'Go back' button is greyed out, you'll need to perform a clean install of 23H2. Unfortunately, Microsoft is no longer offering this version on its website, but you can download an ISO file from www.snipca.com/53498 and install it using Rufus (www.snipca.com/53499).



Files lets you compress folders and files into 7z or ZIP archives

Reduce background noise in video calls using Krisp

Use your phone as a webcam

Microsoft's Phone Link app, which wirelessly connects your phone to your PC, has been around for a few years, but 24H2 adds a new way to link the two devices. Open the Settings app, select 'Bluetooth & devices' then 'Mobile devices' and follow the instructions to connect your phone. This lets you use it as a webcam without needing a USB cable.

Alternatively, use Camo (www.snipca.com/53491) to turn your phone into a webcam. Install its Camo Camera app on your Android or iOS device, and its Camo Studio software on your PC, to stream high-quality video with audio over your Wi-Fi network. Camo's paid-for Pro plan offers extra features, but the free version works brilliantly.

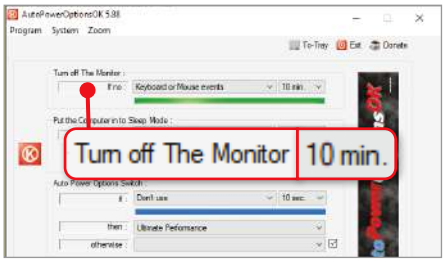
Enhance the audio quality of video calls

The new Voice Clarity feature in Windows 11 24H2 uses AI to enhance the audio quality of your PC's microphone. It removes background noise to make video calls much clearer – go to System, then Sound in the Settings app to enable the new option.

The same benefits are offered by Krisp (www.snipca.com/53492), which also uses AI to remove background noise from video calls (see screenshot above), and enhance the quality of your voice. Specify the video-chat tool you use and Krisp will provide instructions for setting it up with that service. Its free plan works with up to 60 minutes of video per day.

Reduce your PC's energy usage

Windows 11 24H2's new Energy Saver mode (see our Workshop in Issue 701, page 38) extends battery life and reduces electricity consumption by managing power usage across your system. It dims your screen, disables background processes and stops anyone changing your power settings.



AutoPowerOptionsOK helps you control your PC's energy usage

Get similar features from the tiny free tool AutoPowerOptionsOK (www.snipca.com/53494), which is designed to "increase energy efficiency". It will put your monitor and/or computer to sleep after a specified period of inactivity (see screenshot above), and makes it easy to switch between Windows power schemes, including Battery Optimizer and custom plans you've created. ca

Problems Solved

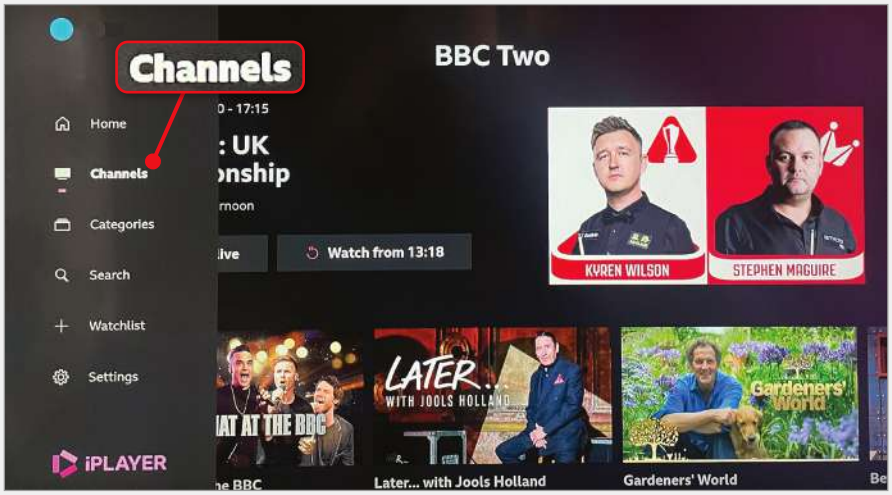
Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Why can't I watch live TV on my Fire Stick?

Q Various ongoing problems with my TalkTalk YouView box caused me to switch to BT for broadband. I then bought an Amazon Fire TV Stick. I realise that I can't get the benefits of a Freeview tuner through a Wi-Fi-only device like this, but I'm very disappointed that I cannot get live BBC TV – only iPlayer. Is this likely to change or not? I wasn't aware of this when I bought the thing.

Judith Ellis



In the iPlayer app on your Fire TV Stick, open the sidebar then choose Channels...

A Actually, you can watch live BBC (and other) broadcasts on Fire TV Sticks, but how to do so isn't all that obvious – especially to the generations of us brought up with traditional TV.

This is because with modern streaming services you can't just flick through channels in the way that's possible with traditional 'terrestrial' TV. That, in turn, is because pretty much every broadcaster has its own app and way of doing things. So, in order to watch BBC content, say, you first have to launch the BBC iPlayer app.

Meanwhile, tuning into live broadcasts from ITV requires you to open the ITVX app. And in each of those apps, you then have to find the particular way to activate the live services that you want – and every app does things a bit differently.

It gets worse. Even a single, service-specific app might display different layouts on different devices. BBC iPlayer on a smartphone or tablet, for example, isn't quite the same as on a Fire TV Stick. Even then, the iPlayer app might not look exactly the same on every TV into which the Fire TV Stick is inserted, because the interface will be adjusted to fit the specific screen size and resolution!

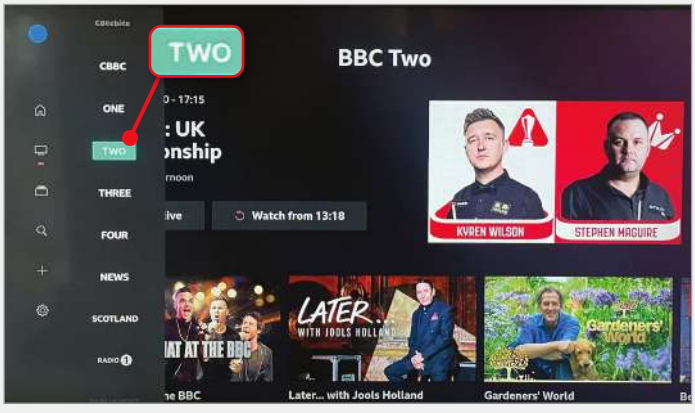
All this makes watching TV just a lot more complicated than it used to be. So, to focus on your specific question, in the iPlayer app for your Fire TV Stick, starting at the Home page, first press the left arrow on your Fire TV Stick remote control to open the sidebar menu. Next, choose Channels (see screenshot above) and press the Select button.

Now navigate right into the channel list, then choose the channel you want (see screenshot below) before once more pressing Select. Finally, move so you highlight the 'Watch live' button then press Select. You're now watching your chosen channel live.

However, you can't just tap a 'Channel Up' or 'Channel Down' button to switch channels. So, if you're watching something on BBC One, say, and want to switch to BBC Two, you'll have to repeat the above steps. If you then want to check ITV1's live output, you'll have to instead open the ITVX app and navigate its interface.

There is hope on the horizon, in the form of Freely (www.freely.co.uk). This is a relatively new streaming service run by the UK's major broadcasters and offers a single interface for watching live and on-demand shows from the main UK TV channels, including BBC, ITV, and Channels 4 and 5.

At the moment it's only available via a limited number of new TV sets, including several that run Amazon's Fire TV system (see the full list at www.snipca.com/53235). There isn't currently a standalone Freely app for Fire TV Sticks, but we wouldn't be surprised if that changes in the coming months.



...then pick the channel you want to watch live before pressing Select

Can I continue to safely use my seven-year-old PC?

Q A couple of years ago, I bought a second-hand Dell OptiPlex 3020 desktop PC with Windows 11 Pro. This no longer installs new Windows updates, with the last one dating back to 2022. The PC is about seven years old and has an Intel Core i5-4570 processor. I cannot locate a TPM on it, so presumably it doesn't meet Microsoft's requirements for continuing with updates? Is there anything I can do to keep using the PC safely?

John Blakemore

Windows 11 Installation Assistant
Create Windows 11 Installation Media
Download Now
Download Windows 11 Disk Image (ISO) for x64 devices

Try updating a lower-spec PC to Windows 11 using Microsoft's free media-creation tool – but be careful

Windows 10 is still available on the *Computeractive* Software Store for £49.99

A This is a tricky situation. The manual for your PC (www.snipca.com/53243) suggests that it does have TPM fitted, albeit the older and less secure 1.2 variant. After launching Windows 11 Microsoft diluted the requirements a little, allowing the operating system to be installed on lower-specification PCs such as yours. However, it explicitly advised against doing so, and warned that it could cause problems in the future (see www.snipca.com/53245).

Also, Microsoft states that Windows 11 requires at least an 8th-generation processor, but the one in your PC is a 4th-generation chip. Moreover, because of the socket type in your PC, it can't be upgraded beyond a 5th-generation processor.

Your PC's previous owner evidently pressed ahead despite the warnings and risks – and now you're facing the consequences. You could try forcing it to update to the latest version of Windows 11 by downloading Microsoft's free media-creation tool from www.snipca.com/53236 (see screenshot above). However, there's no guarantee this will work, and could even result in your PC not working. Be sure to back up first, if attempting this.

One option would be to downgrade to Windows 10. This would require both the purchase of a new Windows 10 licence and a clean install, so you'd lose everything in your current setup. Support for Windows 10 officially ends in October 2025, but Microsoft is actually going to let consumers buy an extra year of updates for $30, so that'd keep you going safely until October 2026, at least – and we have a strong hunch that Microsoft will further extend the Windows 10 support lifeline. Windows 10 is currently available on the *Computeractive* Software Store for £49.99 (www.snipca.com/53296, see screenshot above).

Finally, you could consider ditching Windows for a free version of the Linux operating system, like the popular Mint distro (www.snipca.com/53298). This is likely to be actively supported for many years to come, enabling you to keep using your PC safely. Obviously, though, you'd have to learn an entirely new system – though Mint in particular looks and feels pretty similar to Windows.

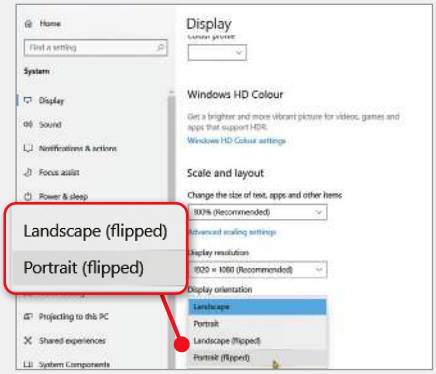
Can I move the PIN pad on my laptop-tablet?

Q My ageing Asus Transformer 3 Pro laptop-tablet has a detachable keyboard that no longer works and a failing touchscreen. Being retired I have to be careful with my small income and this device still does all I need. However, the Windows PIN pad is situated at the bottom of the screen, in an area where parts of the touchscreen won't work. The camera doesn't work either, so I can't sign in that way. So, I have to use a mouse to sign in rather than my finger. This is a small but maddening inconvenience! Is there any way to move this PIN pad?

Andy Aldridge

A You can't change the location of the Windows lock-screen PIN pad, but you should be able to tweak some device settings that will help.

We're not sure if you're using Windows in Tablet mode but, if so, first tap the Action Centre button at the far right of the taskbar, then ensure 'Rotation lock' is disabled (tap to switch it on/off). Now restart and see if flipping your machine into landscape orientation or even upside down puts the PIN pad in a working area of the touchscreen. Otherwise, click the Start button, Settings, then System followed by Display. In the 'Display orientation' dropdown menu choose one of the two 'flipped' options (see screenshot) depending whether you prefer landscape or portrait mode.



Choose either of these options to access working areas of a faulty touchscreen

How do I get multi-room TV without an aerial?

Q I don't have a TV aerial and use Virgin Media to provide my main TV service. If I wanted to have a TV in my bedroom, would any of the various TV sticks work with it or would they require outdoor aerials?

Rob Bennett

A We don't know the details of your Virgin setup but the Virgin TV 360 package allows for up to two additional Virgin boxes on the same account – for a charge, obviously. See more at www.snipca.com/53237. It's best to contact the company to see what this might cost you, because Virgin's pricing depends on many factors.

Otherwise, pretty much all TV sticks work without the need for an aerial, as they're streaming devices rather than TV tuners – so they require a Wi-Fi connection instead.

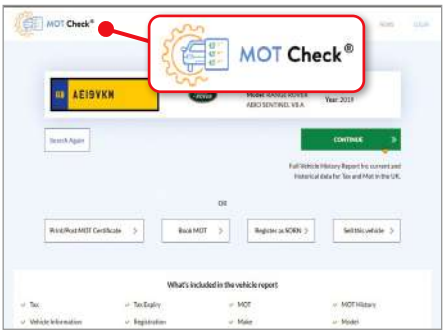
Amazon's Fire TV Stick (from £40, www.snipca.com/53238, pictured below with remote control), for example, just requires an HDMI socket on your TV. With this stick you can access all the key streaming services, including those of the main UK broadcast channels, and watch live TV through their apps (see our reply to Judith Ellis on page 64 for more about this).

Access streaming services and live TV using the Amazon Fire TV stick

Is this MOT email legitimate or spam?

Q I received an email from MOT Check (at www.checkmot.com, pictured right) and reported it as spam. But then I became unsure, because I did indeed own a diesel car between the dates mentioned in the email. However, I don't understand how they acquired my current email address, which I've only recently started using. Can you advise?

Alan Turk

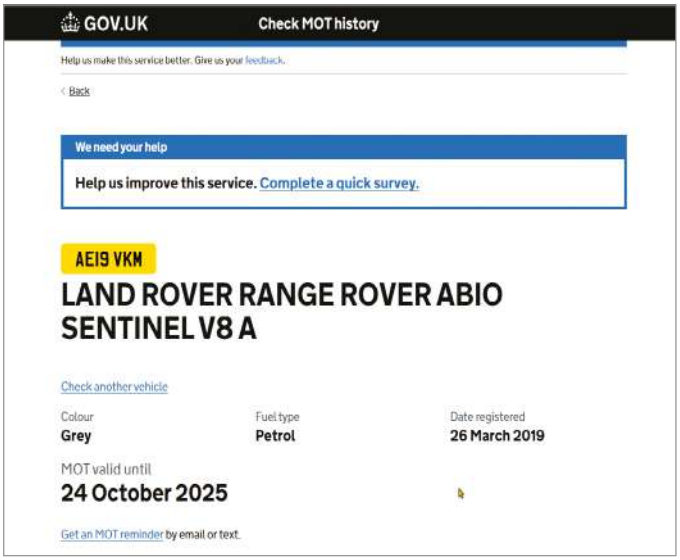


MOT Check is a legal entity and is registered to a limited company based in the UK

A Correspondence via email can be both legitimate *and* spam. By that we mean that the MOT Check service is legal and is registered to a limited company based in the UK. But that company appears to have sent you an unsolicited email (which is the definition of spam).

How it got your email address is impossible to say but, once you use an email address anywhere, it'll very quickly end up on spam databases. Then, while the email might seem to know about your vehicle, the date range provided actually spans 14 years. Many millions of people will have bought, owned or sold diesel cars during this period, so this is nothing more than a scattergun approach that caught your attention (as it was designed to do).

Finally, while we can't comment on the effectiveness or usefulness of Check MOT's paid-for service, we can say that it appears to gather data from a variety of public and commercial sources. At least some of this information can be accessed free of charge, simply by using the UK government's own MOT portal at www.gov.uk/mot (pictured below) – so we'd suggest that's where they found your email address.



Companies can gather vehicle information free of charge from the Government's MOT portal

Q: How does Google know where I parked my car?

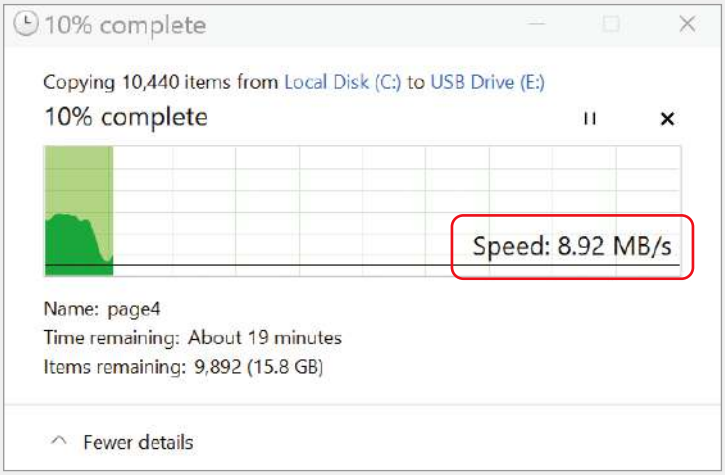
A: Issue 697, page 66 – find it on our 2024 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/53179

Why do my fast file copies slow down?

Q I noticed when I'm copying a large file with numerous sub-files from my Dell OptiPlex 3080 PC to my 32GB SanDisk drive that the speed starts off fast, but then slows right down. The drive is plugged directly into my computer, not via a hub. Do you have any idea why the transfer speed starts off at around 50MB/s, but then soon drops to about 9MB/s (see screenshot)? I suspect it's also happening when I back up to a second external hard drive that I own.

Ian Brighton


10% complete
Copying 10,440 items from Local Disk (C:) to USB Drive (E:)
10% complete
Speed: 8.92 MB/s
Name: page4
Time remaining: About 19 minutes
Items remaining: 9,892 (15.8 GB)
Fewer details

After fast-cache memory is filled up file-transfer speeds can drop to as low as 9MB/s

A What you're experiencing is entirely normal, and could have one of numerous explanations – though it's usually a combination of several. Regardless, they all boil down to the same thing: a drive's 'sustained' write or read speed is often considerably lower than what's known as the 'burst' speed, which is the maximum possible rate in any given moment.

We don't know which SanDisk drive you're using, but most modern USB sticks and external drives have some form of cache memory. This buffers data sent by the computer and works very much faster than the magnetic platters in traditional hard drives, and also quicker than the memory chips used for storage in USB sticks and the like.

This fast-cache memory is relatively small, and will fill up very quickly – and then everything drops to whatever speed can be sustained by the platters or storage chips.

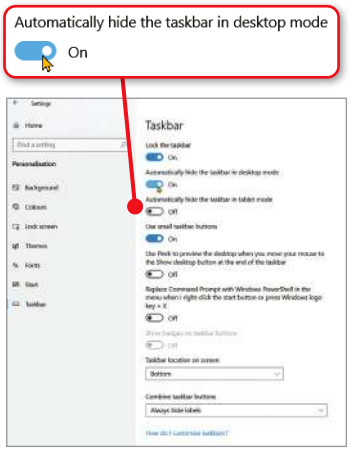
Other factors might include throttling, designed to stop things getting too hot, or the transfer of lots of small files, which simply require more complex handling than one big file.

However, a fast cache and (relatively) slow sustained write speeds are likely to be the major problem here – and the only fix for that would be higher-specification drives.

Will a new OLED screen suffer from burn-in?

Q I'm considering buying an OLED PC monitor, as they seem all the rage. However, I've read that these panels can suffer burn-in. Is this true? And if so, what does one do about the Windows taskbar, say, as that stays on the screen all the time? I find it funny that I'm asking a question about a modern screen that could just as easily have affected my old TV set from decades ago, where I used to worry about a ghostly image of the test card if I accidentally left it on when going to bed! Progress, hey?

Tom Partridge



Set your taskbar to auto-hide to minimise risk of burn-in

OLED monitors, like Alienware's gaming range, have built-in technologies to reduce the risk of burn-in

A There is some truth in this yes, but it's perhaps not all that much of a concern. We don't know which specific screen you have in mind, but many OLED screens use technologies to minimise the risk of burn-in, such as automated pixel-shifting systems and brightness variance, which tend to be all but invisible to the user.

Windows itself also has tools that can help. For example, the taskbar can be set to auto-hide by right-clicking the taskbar then choosing 'Taskbar settings', and then switching on the 'Automatically hide the taskbar in desktop mode' slider (see screenshot above). Alternatively, go to Settings, Personalisation then 'Lock screen' to set a screen timeout – this automatically switches off the display when it's not being using.

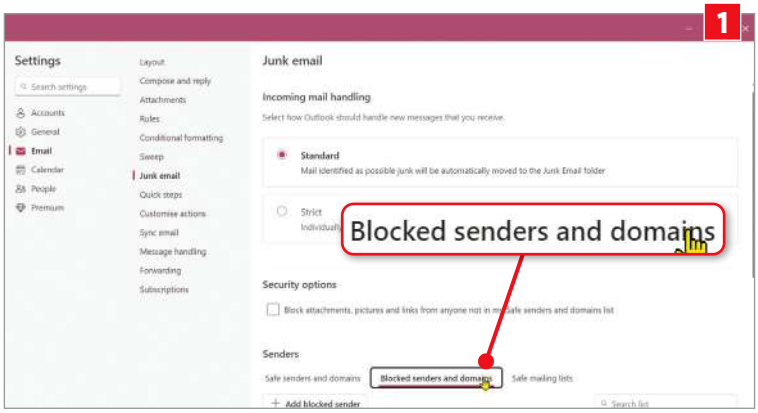
Some monitors, such as Dell's Alienware OLED range (pictured above), also come with specific warranties against burn-in (www.snipca.com/53239) – so evidently some manufacturers don't consider it all that much of a risk.

Can I stop certain scammers emailing me?

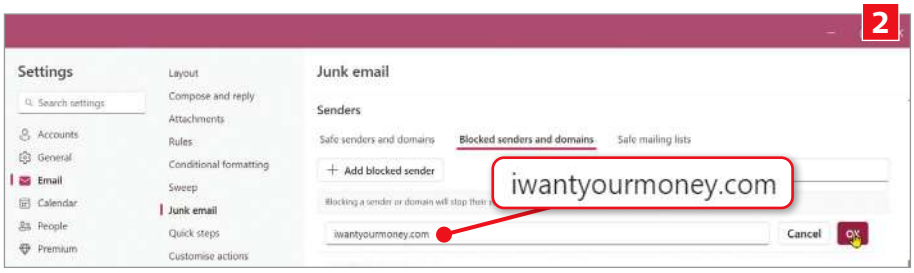
Q Being an avid *Computeractive* reader for many years, I wonder if you can help me. I keep receiving spam emails, which I then block. However, the very nice people who are trying to cheat and swindle me just change the first part of their address. So, today they may email from abc123@iwantyourmoney.com, but tomorrow they'll be back, as def456@iwantyourmoney.com.

Is there any way I can block just the bit after the @ symbol? This would quickly stop even more spam getting through.

Steve Duke



To block specific domains in Outlook select the 'Blocked senders and domains' tab...



...then type the name of the domain and click OK

A The email address section to which you're referring is known as the domain, and many email tools and services will let you block using this alone. You didn't tell us which tool or service you use but, now you know what to look for, you should be able to find the relevant section in the settings area.

In the new Outlook app for Windows, for example, start by clicking the Settings cog top right. Next, on the left, choose Email followed by 'Junk email' and then, on the right, click to select the 'Blocked senders and domains' tab (see screenshot 1). Finally, type the dubious domain – iwantyourmoney.com 2, to use your own example – then click OK. Note that you should type only the domain name itself, not the @ symbol.

Can I make Windows 11 work on my ageing laptop?

Q I bought a refurbished Toshiba ET10 G laptop (pictured) with a 32GB SSD running Windows 11. I've since discovered that Windows 11 really needs a minimum of 64GB storage to run properly.

Would it be possible to downgrade my laptop to Windows 10 so it works properly, or must I upgrade the SSD to 64GB?

Chris Jones

Ageing laptops like the Toshiba ET10 G would probably run better on Linux

A We don't know how Windows 11 ended up on a machine with specifications as limited as yours but you're right that it doesn't meet Microsoft's requirements (see www.snipca.com/53242). The machine would originally have come with Windows 10 installed.

Regardless, you can't upgrade the SSD in this machine because it relies on what's known as an embedded MMC (eMMC). This is storage that's soldered directly to the motherboard so can't be replaced.

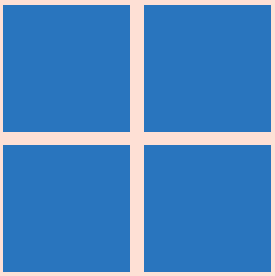
You could in theory install Windows 10 in place of 11, but not free of charge. So, you'd have to buy a new Windows 10 licence. Read our reply to John Blakemore on page 65 for more information on how to do this or how to switch to an alternative system like Linux, which might actually be the best option with a basic machine like this.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Open- and closed-source software?

Q You've mentioned open-source software plenty of times over the years. I've often wondered what this really means and how it differs from what I assume is the opposite – closed-source software. Could you enlighten me? Is one better than the other?

Guy Price



Open-source Linux allows others to tweak its code, while Windows does not

A This is a substantial topic, with the potential to elicit strong views on either side – so we'll try to be both balanced and concise.

We'll start with open-source software, which describes any software whose original ('source') code is made freely available for anyone to view, modify and distribute – a bit like you sharing your recipe for a cake in the knowledge that others will tweak it to their personal taste.

The nature of open-source software means that there tends to be lots of collaboration on popular projects, and they're generally developed for the benefit of all that use them. Typically, problems can be identified and fixed quickly. Some proponents of open-source software argue that these factors, and more, make the likes of Linux – an open-source operating system that's often seen as an alternative to Windows – a better, safer choice (its logo is the penguin pictured above).

But open-source software also has downsides. Just like your original cake might become unrecognisable after a few recipe tweaks, so too can open-source programs. This is why Android can look so very different on smartphones from different manufacturers, for example – because they are free to tweak the original to look and feel the way they think is best.

Closed-source software, on the other hand, is proprietary – meaning the original code is not shared publicly. Windows is probably the best-known example of closed-source software. Other companies are free to release apps and add-ons for it, and users are free to download and install them, but only Microsoft has access to and is able to modify the underlying code. So, with Windows, it's Microsoft's way or the highway.

This creates a consistent experience, but it also means that if you don't like something in Windows, or something is broken, the only choice is to wait for Microsoft to deal with it. Security problems are generally fixed quickly, but Windows users know all about waiting an eternity for Microsoft to address poor or missing features.

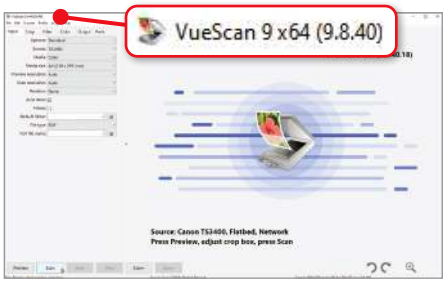
Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Is HP spying on my scans through my Wi-Fi connection?

Q After 15 years of faithful service my trusty Epson printer finally died. My local shop only had an HP model in stock, so I bought that. It carries out printing and copying tasks fine, but recently I wanted to scan some old family photos. I quickly discovered that I couldn't do that without registering the product and leaving it connected to my Wi-Fi network. So, I have to ask why? I should be able to use its three basic functions as I wish, but it seems HP insists I use Wi-Fi for scanning. Doesn't this open up the opportunity for the company to have remote access to what I'm scanning? What are your thoughts?

Brian Lucas

A HP often attempts to railroad users into registering for an account in order to scan, using its HP Smart software and online 'platform' – but it's not actually required.



For more scanning customisation options, consider buying the Vuescan tool

Only the company could tell you in detail what it does with the data of those who do register but, like you, we're not fans of this tactic.

You have a couple of alternatives. The first is to use the Windows Scan app that comes with Windows. If you've previously uninstalled it for some reason, download it free from www.snipca.com/53240. Once installed, just click the Windows Start menu, then choose Scan.

Scan works just fine but has very little customisation. If you'd like to do more, then consider purchasing Vuescan (starting from £25, www.snipca.com/53241, pictured left). This long-established tool offers compatibility with a huge range scanners, and plenty of options to explore.

Next Issue

ON SALE Weds 12 Feb

- How do I stop Firefox nagging about updates?
- How do I disable Chrome's search bar?
- Is a wiped iPad safe to sell?

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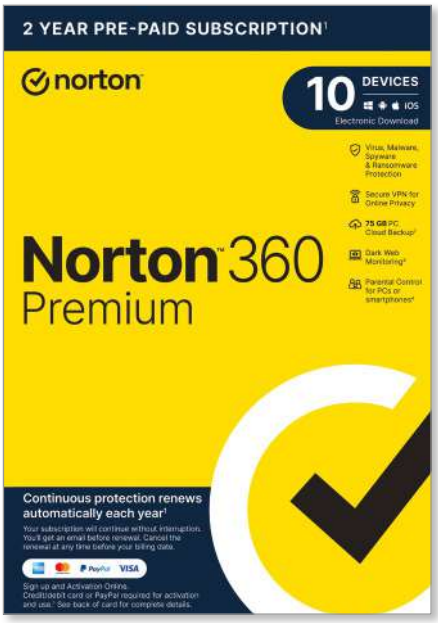

Norton is made by NortonLifeLock Inc – a standalone company dedicated to consumer cyber safety. It has always performed strongly in *Computeractive* antivirus tests, so we highly recommend it.

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Reader Support

Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email **editor@computeractive.co.uk** and we'll do our best to help

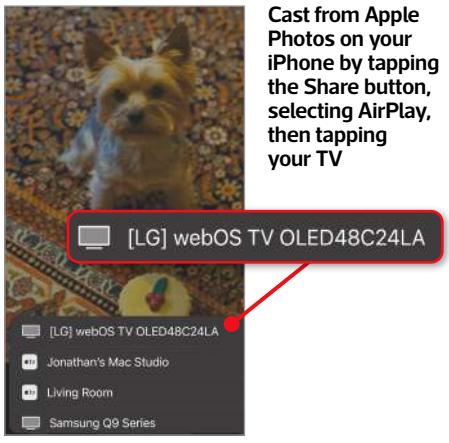
Does Chromecast need an internet connection?

Q In Issue 697 (page 67) you helped William Robertson with a question about casting photos to a TV. He seemed to be asking about using the TV as an external screen for a smartphone. In your answer you mentioned Chromecast, which I believe needs an internet connection. Can you confirm this? Also, will the same method work for an iPhone or does this need different hardware?

Martyn Sandford

A As we explained in Issue 697, you can cast photos from the Google Photos app on your phone to a smart TV that has Chromecast support built in, or to an external Chromecast device connected to the TV's HDMI socket. Both your phone and your TV or Chromecast must be connected to the same Wi-Fi network, but you should be able to cast photos even if you don't have an internet connection.

In answer to your second question, yes, you can also cast photos to your TV from an iPhone. If your smart TV supports Apple's AirPlay casting standard, you can cast snaps from within the Apple Photos app by tapping the Share button, then selecting AirPlay and selecting your TV from the list of available devices (see screenshot below). If your TV supports Chromecast instead (or if you have a Chromecast attached to your TV), you can install the Google Photos app from your iPhone's App Store and use the same method we've outlined here.



Cast from Apple Photos on your iPhone by tapping the Share button, selecting AirPlay, then tapping your TV

Why won't Handy Viewer work with RW2 photos?

Q I have a query about Handy Viewer (www.snipca.com/50755), which appeared in your round-up of readers' favourite software (Issue 700, page 53). It works well most of the time, but struggles with .RW2 pictures from my Panasonic camera, which it displays as a narrow horizontal ribbon. The RW2 format is listed among the 150 formats Handy Viewer supports (www.snipca.com/53421), so what's going wrong?

Richard Palmer

A RW2 is a RAW photo file format used by Panasonic Lumix digital cameras. In other words, it's a pixel-for-pixel record of what the camera captures when you take a photo, with none of the processing or compression associated with formats like JPEG. The trouble is that compatibility with RW2 files can vary depending on which Panasonic camera you use. You don't say which model you own, but here are a few things you can try.

If you can't open RW2 files in the Windows Photos app, try installing Microsoft's free Raw Image Extension codec pack app from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/53439, pictured above right). If that doesn't work, try Silkypix Developer Studio SE, which Panasonic recommends for processing and editing raw files from its Lumix cameras. Users of Panasonic cameras can get it for free from www.snipca.com/53440.

Alternatively, use a file converter, such as Adobe's free Digital Negative Converter (www.snipca.com/53441), to convert your RW2 files to the more widely supported DNG raw format.

Raw Image Extension
Microsoft Windows
2.8 ★ 109 ratings System Components
PEGI 3
THIS VERSION OF RAW IMAGE EXTENSION INCLUDES SUPPORT FOR CR3 FILES IN ADDITION TO OTHER BUG...

If you can't view RW2 files, try the free Raw Image Extension codec pack

Did you misunderstand my BitLocker query?

Q Thank you for printing my question in Issue 698, page 66 ('How can I find my BitLocker recovery key to unlock my laptop?'). Unfortunately, you misunderstood the issue. I've spent many hours trying to get the BitLocker key from wherever it's buried. My point was to highlight the fact that now I can't use my Lenovo laptop without performing a factory reset, simply because I ran a perfectly valid update. There was no warning before the BIOS update. Can you confirm there's no way round the problem that doesn't involve me losing some of my important files and photos during a reset?

Steve Brockwell

A We entirely sympathise with your situation – it must be extremely galling to find that an update has locked you out of your own PC. You're well within your rights to raise a complaint. As Lenovo issued the update, you'll need to call the company's technical support line (0800 328 1935) to register your complaint and ask for it to be escalated.

However, as we outlined in our original response, you shouldn't need to factory reset your PC or lose any files to regain access to your computer. You should be able to retrieve the BitLocker recovery key for your computer from your Microsoft account using the instructions we printed in Issue 698. Entering this key when prompted will unlock your PC without resetting it or erasing any data.

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

AMOLED An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays.

API Application Programming Interface. A system built into a program so that other programs can work with it.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen. Traditional PC screens are 4:3. Widescreen displays are 16:9 or 16:10.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Beta A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are often released so problems can be ironed out.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. Software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Bluetooth LE Bluetooth low energy. A type of Bluetooth technology designed to consume less power.

Bloatware Unwanted software built into a new device.

Blue screen of death Technically called a 'Stop error', this is shown when your PC crashes.

Burn-in Damage to a computer or TV screen that occurs when a very bright image has been displayed for too long.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A program designed to recreate conversation with humans.

Chiclet Small, flat, square keys with rounded corners.

Clean install An operating system installation that overwrites all other content on the hard drive.

Code Programming languages used to create software.

Copilot+ An enhanced version of Microsoft's Copilot AI tool. Also used to classify Windows 11 computers with a neural processing unit (NPU) that can perform over 40 trillion operations per second (TOPS).

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Crowdfunding A process where a company gets the financing to launch a new product from prospective customers online.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country.

CSS A digital rights management (DRM) system used on DVDs.

CSV Comma Separated Value. A standard file format, used for storing information in tables, that can be opened by most spreadsheet programs.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DHCP A system where one device on a network, normally the router, distributes network addresses to the others on request.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

Distro A version of the Linux OS and the programs that go with it.

Dithering A process that uses dots of colour or black to give the impression of more colours.

DNS Domain Name System. A technology that associates computers with their addresses on the internet.

DOCX The default file format used by Word 2007 and later.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

dpi Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality, or the size an object will be shown on screen.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

eSIM A virtual SIM card that's built into a phone.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows.

Factory reset Restoring a device to the manufacturer's default settings.

Fps Frames per second. Normally used to indicate gaming performance.

Gesture Finger movements on a screen that perform an action, such as pinching to zoom.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

GPIO General Purpose Input/Output. Refers to pins on a microcontroller or single-board computer (such as a Raspberry Pi) that can be configured to either send (output) or receive (input) electrical signals.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

Hotkey A key set up to perform a complex action.

HTML Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to write most web pages.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

IMEI Integrated Mobile Equipment Identity. A unique number used to identify each mobile phone.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IP65 Dust-proof, and protected from water jets at any angle.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

ISO file A type of image file that contains data from a CD or DVD.

JavaScript An older programming language developers use to make web pages interactive.

JPEG A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

Layers Image-editing programs let users create multiple layers, which can be drawn on, re-ordered or hidden.

LLM Large language model. A type of artificial intelligence algorithm that analyses huge amounts of data sets to summarise and create content.

Membrane keyboard Keyboards that use rubber domes that connect to small electrical contacts.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroHDMI An HDMI connector measuring 6.4x2.8mm.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

MP4 A type of digital movie file often used for portable players.

Neural network Computer systems that mimic how the human brain works.

OCR Optical character recognition. The process by which printed text is scanned and converted into documents that can be edited.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in PC and TV screens.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

Plain text Text in a document that doesn't contain any formatting, such as bold characters and italics.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

Python library Code that provides functions and tools for Python programs.

QR code A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

Qt A system for using text placeholders (like x or xx) for formatting output in snippet fields.

RAM The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

RAW A format for digital photos that stores the image exactly as the camera captured it.

Read speed How long it takes a hard drive to 'read' data, and respond to it.

Refurbished A second-hand device that has been repaired by its manufacturer so that it can be resold and reused.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

Secure Boot A security standard designed to make sure your PC avoids malware when booting.

SEO Search engine optimisation. Improving where your site appears in search results to encourage more people to visit.

SIM The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

Source code Program instructions that are readable by people but not computers.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

Subpixel A smaller unit of a pixel, typically red, green and blue, that creates full-colour images on screens.

System restore point System files stored at a given time to which Windows can revert if necessary.

Temporary file Created by sites and software to store info for a specific purpose.

Throttle Intentionally slowing broadband speeds to manage congestion on a network.

Timestamp The time which an event is recorded by a computer.

Tor Browser A web browser designed for anonymous surfing.

TPM A chip that stores keys which encrypt data on your hard drive.

TV tuner An expansion card that receives TV signals.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user.

TXT A basic file format that contains nothing but text.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible, letting you plug it in upside down.

VESA A standard mount for attaching monitors to stands, walls and PCs.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called 802.11ax.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

Write speed How long it takes a hard drive to save data.

XLSX The default file format for Microsoft Excel since version 2007.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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Easy when you

Know How

Tired of Microsoft junk slowing his system, **Robert Irvine** uses a revived clean-up tool to...

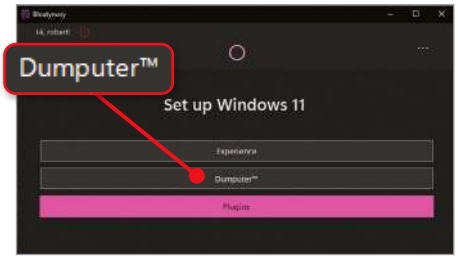
Remove bloatware from his PC

In the four years I've been writing this column, I've tried my best to keep the content fresh. Covering the same old software is even less interesting than reading about it, so I've endeavoured not to repeat myself and give my boss an excuse to replace me with ChatGPT (see our cover feature on page 50).

> Would Bloatynosy finally live up to its silly name and rid my system of junk?

This issue is no exception, though the theme may seem familiar. Back in Issue 680, I wrote about a program called CoTweaker, which claimed to use AI to remove bloatware from Windows 10 and 11. It was previously called Bloatynosy, then BloatnosyAI and subsequently renamed Winpilot, before its developer discontinued it.

So I was intrigued to learn that Bloatynosy has been revived under its original name (www.snipca.com/53417), this time apparently for keeps. The developer has ditched gimmicks such as its recreation of the annoying Office assistant Clippy, and focused on making the program "efficient and user-friendly".



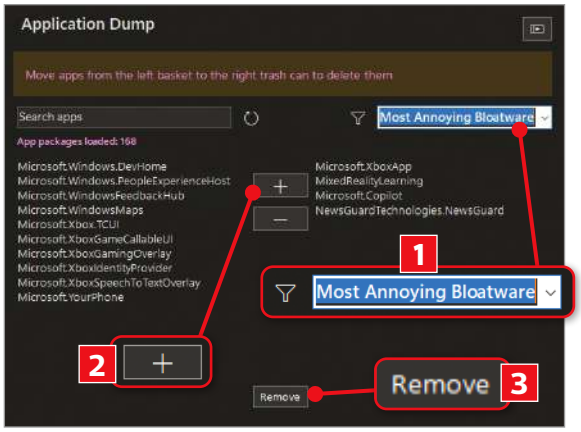
Bloatynosy's Dumputer lets you remove unwanted Windows apps

Despite my concern that by the time you read this Bloatynosy will have had several more name changes and turned into a butterfly, the revamped tool looked promising enough to give it another try. Despite my best housekeeping efforts, my PC is still bloated with all manner of Microsoft rubbish and rapidly running out of space. Would Bloatynosy finally live up to its silly name and rid my system of junk?

To find out, I downloaded the latest version from www.snipca.com/53416. At the time of writing, this was v1.0.6, but updates are coming thick and fast. I extracted the EXE installer from the ZIP file, and clicked 'More info' then 'Run anyway' when I saw the SmartScreen warning. The program receives a clean bill of health from VirusTotal (see www.snipca.com/53418), so is obviously keeping its bloaty nose clean.

The home screen opened with a message to 'Set up Windows 11', which was disheartening because I was using my Windows 10 laptop. But the developer says Bloatynosy "can also be used on Windows 10, though not all settings are applicable there". Clicking the Experience button confirmed that many options are indeed specific to Windows 11, such as aligning the Start button to the left, revealing the full right-click menu and disabling the controversial Recall feature.

However, I was more interested in the Dumputer tool (see screenshot left), which lets you remove unwanted apps (though not traditional desktop programs). Clicking this button listed all the apps on my PC, whether installed by Microsoft and its partners or by me from the Microsoft Store. A handy dropdown



Robert was able to remove some but not all bloatware apps from his PC

menu offered several ways to filter this list, with options including Microsoft Apps, Games and Most Annoying Bloatware. Choosing the latter (1 in our screenshot above) displayed entries including Xbox App, Copilot, NewsGuard and MixedRealityLearning.

I clicked the plus-sign button 2 to move these four from the left-hand 'basket' to the right-hand 'trash can', then clicked the Remove button 3 to see what would happen. Bloatynosy successfully removed all but the last one, which surprised me because I assumed Copilot would put up more of a fight. It achieved a similar hit rate with other bloat, removing most junk apps but failing to purge others.

The removal process was fast and straightforward, though I prefer the handholding of O&O AppBuster (www.snipca.com/53420), which offers to create a system restore point before it uninstalls anything. Bloatynosy's Dumputer provides information about each app when you click the button in its top-right corner, but AppBuster's presentation is much clearer.

Bloatynosy has improved significantly since I tried its previous incarnation. I don't think it's quite 'ready for prime time', but as it's evolving rapidly, who nose what the future will bring?

Need help with removing bloatware and other junk from your computer? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Next issue: Robert tries to switch to an ergonomic mouse

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